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# A tank full of wishful thinking: Crystallizing the rhythms of the road

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A Tank Full of Wishful Thinking: Crystallizing the Rhythms of the Road

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a personal exploration of American car culture — the roads the enable it, the everyday actions that sustain it, and the values that justify it. I use a constellation of mobilities, autoethnography, and rhythmanalysis in order to generate a glimpse into the rhythm of our road-centered culture — how it shapes and constrains our lives in mundane and extraordinary ways, why it is largely taken for granted, and why it is so stubbornly persistent. I use a variety of artistic, evocative methods, including narrative, poetry, and music, because I argue that knowing is not enough — we must feel it in our guts if we ever hope to enact change. I contribute the explicit use of rhythmanalysis as a way of bridging the divide between mobilities and autoethnography, and the use of music composition as a method of inquiry.

## CHAPTER 1

As a self-identified researcher, my interest in roads is guided by a drive for inquiry, a need to answer the questions so typical of a wandering heart (Singleton & Straits, 2010). While I have answered and added questions over the years, there is one that stands out as particularly motivating to me: Where does that road go? I've been asking this question as long as I can remember, annoying my parents with my constant refrain, never accepting their answers as good enough, because what I really hoped to achieve in asking was for them to indulge my curiosity, turn on a whim, and let me experience where the road went. They rarely, if ever, did so.

This didn't stop my asking, though. When I learned to drive and was awarded my official driver's license from the Commonwealth of Virginia at the age of 16 years and three months, I took to the roads. For the first time in my life I was in control of my own destination. Finally, I could find out where those roads went, experiencing the turns, the traffic, and the endless (though not always dead-endless) possibilities.

What I found was mostly ordinary suburban roads, but occasionally I found remnants of a time when subdivisions had been farmland, and hills had not been flattened under foundations. These "discoveries" of what had always been on a map, but which I had never lived, only fueled my fascination. The names often hinted at a time when small, winding paths had been the main means of travel: Old Hoadly Road, Old Ox Road, Old Yates Ford Road. Each had a modern counterpart, paved and marked, with straighter routes and higher speed limits.

I began to ask, not where the road went, but what it had covered, destroyed, or bypassed. The clues were easy to spot — family cemeteries, deteriorating barns and silos,



farmhouses that crumbled under the weight of vines, trees, and other growth lingered at intersections, along highways, and across from strip malls. The agricultural past blended in with the litter that collected on the side of the road; it was no more than an eyesore, an unpleasant reminder of the costs of progress and development. While the walls of these structures had watched this progress unfold, they could not whisper to me the lives, the stories, or the values of the women and men who had occupied and utilized them — even if walls could talk, I would never have been able to hear them over the traffic. This led me to question the life to which I was accustomed: to the speed, the noise, the eight-lane highways.

When I moved away to college, I found myself without easy access to a car. I became a pedestrian, building my shopping routines around what stores I could walk to and judging how many errands I could run by how much I could carry. Having grown up in the suburbs, I wasn't used to so many things being within walking distance. And the more I walked, the farther "walking distance" came to encompass. Walking, and later biking, became my preferred methods of transportation, seeming easier, quicker, cheaper, and healthier than driving. Yet friends would constantly offer me rides to destinations less than a mile away, leading me to wonder, at what point did driving become a more natural mode of moving than the movements and capabilities of my own body?

### **Goals of Inquiry**

These questions, and others concerning our cultural obsession with speed, movement, and roads as a means to those ends, have led to this current study. Like Whitman before me, I confront the road: "You road I enter upon and look around! I believe you are not all that is here! I believe that something unseen is also here"

(Whitman, 1856). In this thesis, I will pursue three outcomes: advocacy, a contribution to methodology, and a critical reading of the road in our everyday lives. I will seek to make the unseen, the unnoticed, the deliberately ignored, seen, heard, and felt. I will advocate for the awareness of what is ever present, but presently ignored. I will use performative writing to transform the mundane, taken-for-granted aspects of roads into the dramatic exchanges of power, culture, and ideology they really are. I will put forward music as a method, not just as a metaphor, for understanding, interpreting, communicating, and commenting on research and lived experiences.

In order to achieve these goals, I will draw from the theory of mobilities to make sense of our movement on the road: the material realities, what it means, how it changes our experiences (Cresswell, 2006). In order to best embody this theory, I will explore creative analytic practices such as autoethnography and music in order to understand how their collective focus on self-reflection, cultural critique, and resonant expressivity can contribute to a more meaningful interpretation of the role of the road in our everyday lives (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Lashua & Cohen, 2010; Pelias, 1999; Richardson, 2000). It is also important to contextualize and situate this inquiry in the historical perspectives and decisions that have led to our current structures and perspectives supporting road use, maintenance, and construction.

This historical contextualization will guide this inquiry in the spirit of place and mobility, rather than the more stagnant, ahistorical concepts of location and movement (Cresswell, 2006), and will help establish the car culture (Sheller, 2004) that I am researching within, since according to Goodall (1994) our “angle of observation” is influenced by culture and language, and “culture, as a symbol, encourages us to direct our

attention” to meaningful orders. And yet, as Goodall points out, despite the acknowledged symbolic importance of automobiles in American culture, we hardly ever, as researchers, “spend more time in parking lots.”

### **One Hundred Years of Public Roads**

The year 2016 is a major mile-marker for the American landscape, as it marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first federal funding legislation for roads, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the National Park System, and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the Interstate Highway System. These three developments would forever change how we as Americans access and relate to our environment. The increasing popularity of automobile travel led to a rapid expansion of roads, from just five thousand miles of completed, paved highway in 1921 to 2.65 million miles of paved roads, including the 47,432 miles of the Interstate Highways. No landscape was off-limits when it came to road building, and roads were quickly built (or in many cases improved) in rural and urban areas, across mountainous and desert landscapes, and into the heart of many National Parks.

Prior to the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916, road building and maintenance was seen as a state and local responsibility (Lewis, 2013; Weingroff, 1996). In fact, before the Supreme Court’s decision in *Wilson v. Shaw* (1907), it was not clear whether the federal government even had the power to fund and build public roads. The Federal Aid Road Act gave the Bureau of Public Roads<sup>1</sup> \$75 million to spend on building and improving a

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<sup>1</sup> This organization has gone by many names over the years: Office of Road Inquiry, 1893-1904; Office of Public Roads under the Department of Agriculture, 1905-1914; Bureau of Public Roads, 1915-1938; Public Roads Administration, 1939-1948; Bureau of

national road system, and this would prove to be the first of many highway-funding acts that would be passed over the next 100 years (Jakle & Sculle, 2008; Lewis, 2013).

### **Our Changing Orientation Toward Roads**

While we tend to think of roads as existing primarily for automobile travel, which makes sense given that their design is directly a result of automobile design and function, the initial “good roads” movement had little to do with automobiles. The League of American Wheelmen, a lobbying group for bicyclists’ interests, began the “good roads” movement in the late 1800’s (Karnes, 2009; Lewis, 2013). The deplorable roads which plagued the American Wheelmen also made early automobile travel dangerous and nearly impossible, making it more of a novel adventure and source of recreation than of practical travel (Jakle & Sculle, 2008). Farmers quickly realized the potential for better roads and for trucks as a means of reaching more markets in less time, shifting the focus of “good roads” from recreation to commerce and agriculture.

Roads quickly took on a defense aspect with the start of the First World War, when the army shipped materials from the Midwest to the ports on the East Coast by truck. One convoy took three weeks to make the journey from Toledo, Ohio to Baltimore (Lewis, 2013). This defense orientation remained a major part of road funding justification, evident in the popular name of Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 — the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act. These four areas, agricultural, commerce, recreation, and defense, were the four components of American life that good roads supported, and continue to support to this day. Roads built for any purpose have

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Public Roads under the Department of Commerce, 1949-1966; Federal Highway

Administration under the Department of Transportation, 1967-present

important implications for the landscape, but roads built for recreational purposes in particular have important implications for how Americans conceptualize and relate to nature (Louter, 2009).

### **Roads and Nature**

Our understanding of the relationship between roads and nature has changed drastically over the years. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the emergence of automobile tourism had important implications for how far and how fast Americans traveled (Jakle & Sculle, 2008). Day trips by car allowed the middle class to get out and see the landscape without having to miss work (Louter, 2009), and combined the political and cultural values of the time — “technology, consumerism, appreciation of nature, the quest for adventure, and the illusion of personal freedom” — into one activity (Julin, 2008). This also began the trend of developing attractions that would entice travelers to certain areas, including the newly consolidated National Parks.

At the start of World War I, the National Parks became associated with the “See America First” tourist campaign (Jakle & Sculle, 2008; Julin, 2008). This encouraged Americans to get out and experience public lands with a nationalistic spirit. To accommodate the increase in automobile traffic into parks, as well as to encourage new visitors, Stephen Mather, director of the National Park Service from 1917 to 1928, urged National Parks to extend and improve automobile infrastructure both within and outside of the parks (Julin, 2008; Louter, 2009). Many National Park parkways, such as the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Going-to-the-Sun Road, were begun during the 1930s as a result of New Deal labor and funding, and they put the most current innovations in engineering, construction, and landscape architecture to use in order to build roads that seemed to

emerge out of the natural landscape (Hall & FRIENDS of the Blue Ridge Parkway, 2007; Louter, 2009; Whisnant, 2008).

Automobile tourism, then, not only affected how Americans vacationed, but also how they experienced nature. Louter (2009) refers to this new vision of the American landscape as “windshield wilderness,” because with the improved infrastructure around the country and especially within National Parks, people were increasingly experiencing nature as scenic moments framed by the border of a windshield. This equation of the wilderness with the scenic explains the early idea that roads and wilderness could not only coexist, but could coexist in harmony. Even environmental advocates and groups such as John Muir and the Sierra Club viewed automobile tourism as a way of gaining political support for National Parks. As people began to consider the consequences of covering some of the most sublime landscapes in America with roads, the conceptualization of wilderness began to shift, leading to the eventual equation of wilderness with roadless, in part facilitated by the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the 2001 Roadless Rule (Walker, 2004).

The development of the road ecology perspective is evidence that engineering, biology, ecology, and land management have also shifted their outlook on the relationship and interaction between roads and nature (Forman et al., 2003; Spellerberg, 2002). Before the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ecology largely ignored the miles of roads that traversed, divided, and impacted landscapes and ecological communities. Road ecology describes “the interaction of organisms and the environment linked to roads and vehicles” (Forman et al., 2003, p. 7). Roads, vehicles, and other related infrastructure form a road system, so broadly speaking, the interactions between the road system and the natural environment

comprise the focus of road ecology. This conceptualization requires humans to recognize the systemic impacts that roads and driving have on the land, and the organisms that inhabit the land, surrounding roads. Road systems in urban areas posed ecological consequences as well as cultural and political tension, and conflicts over urban highways led Americans to resist the pervasiveness of roads.

### **Roads and Cities**

Some of the most politically problematic highways were those that were constructed in urban areas (DiMento & Ellis, 2012; Gioielli, 2014; Karnes, 2009; Lewis, 2013). When Eisenhower signed the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, states were encouraged to build interstate highways in a ten-year period, and if they met the criteria the federal government would pay ninety percent of the costs of construction, with states being responsible for just the remaining ten percent. This had an enormous impact on urban travel by privileging and encouraging limited-access highway construction over other forms of mass transit, and because of the limited time-span, led localities and states to rush development plans in order to receive federal funding.

The construction of urban highways did little to solve the problem of urban blight, and in fact further facilitated the mass exodus to suburban housing developments and destroyed existing tight-knit, primarily minority, communities (Gioielli, 2014; Lewis, 2013). Since federal funding was only given to states for the construction of limited-access freeways, the new roads did little to serve urban communities, instead allowing suburban residents to bypass areas of the downtown or city center in order to make commuting and through-travel easier. Those that remained in the city had to deal with the noise and air pollution of large highways, the seizure of land and properties through

eminent domain, as well as deteriorating urban infrastructure. Aging mass transit systems went neglected, and with more people able to commute by car, these systems were largely under-utilized.

Urban residents, however, were not content to stand by and let their communities be polluted and destroyed. Residents in Baltimore and New Orleans, for example, organized grassroots advocacy campaigns that eventually prevented the construction of highways that would have ruined iconic neighborhoods (Gioielli, 2014; Lewis, 2013). These movements along with growing environmental awareness in the 1970s led to a fundamental shift in the design and planning process for urban highways. The flaws of “futuristic” elevated highways were exposed; the areas of blight that occurred underneath the structures, as well as the noise and air pollution that occurred at window-level for many city residents were no longer acceptable to city planners. Cities such as Seattle and Boston have replaced elevated or ground-level highways with underground freeways that limit noise pollution and allow for a better utilization of city land (Lewis, 2013; Register, 2006), but are not without environmental and political consequences (Leslie, 2015). The environmental, social, and political consequences of road construction, maintenance, and use are a key theme within the remainder of this thesis. In the next section, I provide a “road map” of the coming chapters.

### **Route Overview**

In Chapter 2, I situate the study of roads in terms of mobilities, autoethnography, and performative writing. I will introduce connections within the literature by establishing Henri Lefebvre’s (2004) rhythmanalysis as a linking orientation that will bridge the external focus of mobilities with the internal focus of autoethnography, and



suggesting music composition as a method of inquiry. In discussing performative writing, I will operationalize art as advocacy that engages the human side of people, making it more difficult for them to “tune out” the way they might when faced with more technical or political styles of rhetoric (Buckland, Boyd, & Bloch, 2012, p. 100-101). This is important given the advocacy goal of this thesis; in performing advocacy, I will attempt to move people to action by first moving them emotionally.

In Chapter 3, I will use crystallization to examine how the Blue Ridge Parkway functions as a cultural artifact. A combined methodological approach of applied rhetorical criticism, autoethnographic narrative, and music composition each provide an interpretation of a five-day trip down the Parkway, and these interpretations are used to make sense of the “rhythm” of the road. The slower pace, exhibits, and overlooks contribute to a unique cultural experience that draws on American tropes and myths of the pioneer, the sublime, and the georgic.

Chapter 4 is a collection of autoethnographic moments on the road, told through narrative, poetry, and song. This chapter seeks to capture and evoke the feelings associated with driving in everyday settings, drawing on themes such as uncertainty and inevitability. The autoethnographic scenes are connected by the lyrics of a song written before I began this thesis project, contrasting a voice of natural skepticism with an informed, critical voice.

In Chapter 5 I summarize the work accomplished in this thesis. I revisit the goals of inquiry, and discuss important moments in the thesis when I advance each goal. I then consider avenues that I have not yet explored, including growing signs of cultural change. I then close with some thoughts about the pervasiveness of our car culture.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Situating the Study**

This thesis is informed by three orientations to research and lived experience: mobilities, autoethnography, and rhythmanalysis. The literature on these three orientations suggests theories, methods, and ways of viewing the world that make it difficult to identify one clear theory or method, and instead provide a constellation of approaches that, when used together, compliment and supplement each other. In this chapter, I will situate the study within the literatures of mobilities and auteothnography. I will then present rhythmanalysis as a way of connecting and reconciling the use of mobilities and autoethnography together. To begin, I will elaborate on the relevant literature about the new mobilities paradigm.

### **The New Mobilities Paradigm**

Because the road environment is always in motion, it is important to adopt a perspective that considers how the movements and interactions within, through, and around it generate meaning. Mobilities, or the “new mobilities paradigm,” seeks to understand time and space by acknowledging the real and imagined movements, and the meanings and implications of those movements, of people in and through environments (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Over the past decade the “mobilities turn” has (re)focused social science on questions of how movement constitutes our reality in order to better understand the complexities and transience of human life.

Urry (2007) clarifies the terms “mobile” and “mobility” by laying out four main interpretations: being able to (or capable of being able to) move; the mob, which moves with disorder and is therefore in need of regulating; vertical social mobility, or the ability

(or inability) to move within a social hierarchy; and geographical migration. Cresswell (2006) similarly considers mobility in terms of physically observable mobility, representations of mobility, and embodied mobility. That is to say, movement that can be charted, modeled, and analyzed, artifacts that talk about and explain ideological and physical movement, and movement that we experience sensually. The new mobilities paradigm is interested in each of these aspects of mobility, and how networks of mobile and immobile structures and systems create, enforce, and are enforced by systems of meaning and power (Cresswell, 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007). One important mobilities system is the system of automobility, which I discuss in the following section.

### **Automobilities**

A significant portion of mobilities literature focuses on automobilities (Bull, 2004; Conley & McLaren, 2009; Edensor, 2011; Featherstone, 2004; Laurier, 2011; Merriman, 2011; Sheller, 2004; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2004). Automobility is the predominant global form of mobility, and the resultant industries that support automobile production, consumption, and operation are the most important consumers of environmental resources (Urry, 2004). Beyond the physical and material structures, the system of automobility comprises the cultural ideals, symbols, and power that make automobility attractive both individually and globally. The result of a dominant system of automobility that privileges motor vehicle travel over other forms of mobility is a car culture, such as the United States, where automobility affects all aspects of life from the home and family (Noy, 2009), to patterns of work and business (Edensor, 2011), to ideas of relaxation and interaction with nature (Louter, 2009).

In the United States, the car culture is particularly persistent given the cultural association of automobiles with national values such as individualism, freedom, and privacy (Urry, 2004). While these values have been present throughout American history from the Declaration of Independence to Manifest Destiny, automobility has functioned to intensify them. The “freedom of the road” is coercive in that it does more than merely allow for flexibility — it requires it (Sheller, 2004; Urry, 2004). Urry (2004) explains:

Automobility is a Frankenstein-created monster, extending the individual into realms of freedom and flexibility whereby inhabiting the car can be positively viewed and energetically campaigned and fought for, but also constraining car ‘users’ to live their lives in spatially stretched and time-compressed ways. The car is the literal ‘iron cage’ of modernity, motorized, moving and domestic. (p. 28)

In addition to coercive flexibility, automobility creates and necessitates excessive individualism. Car users must adjust to their own individualized sense of time in the absence of organized mass-transit schedules (Urry, 2004; Urry, 2007). Traveling semi-isolated in a vehicle, drivers can manipulate their environment within the car, adjusting temperature, seat position, and sound. Bull (2004) refers to drivers’ ability to personalize their soundscape as traveling in “accompanied solitude,” and this “need” has given rise to a range of radio stations and accessories that allow for greater individualization.

Building on the values associated with automobility, Sheller (2004) highlights the affective dimension of car cultures and argues that the emotions generated at the personal, social, and national levels regarding car use are understudied and overlooked when considering strategies for creating a more ethically conscious culture of automobility. How we feel when driving or riding, or when recalling instances of driving

and riding, is a result of the “co-constitution of motion and emotion.” Different types of mobility afford different affective orientations based on personal or cultural preferences and technologies, adding to the complexity and persistence of the car culture.

Foregrounding affective experiences is important to scholars who utilize creative analytic practices, which is the second area of influence for my approach to this thesis.

### **Creative Analytic Practices**

Just as mobilities has sought to (re)focus social science on questions of movement, meaning, and power, autoethnography has sought to (re)introduce embodied, lived experience into academic scholarship (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015; Denzin, 2014; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Pelias, 2004). Just as life is often messy, blurry, and diverse, so are the names used to describe the genre of qualitative research that accepts, embraces, and makes sense of this messiness. Scholars have used interpretive ethnography (Goodall, 1994), performance (Pelias, 2004), autoethnography (Adams et al., 2015; Denzin, 2014; Ellis & Bochner, 2000), creative analytic practices (Richardson, 2000), and crystallization (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson, 2000) to define their research. While each of these terms have differing connotative and denotative meanings and interpretations, they each operate from similar worldviews and seek to generate evocative representations of social phenomena through various textual and non-textual means, and I will therefore use various terms at various times depending on what is most appropriate in context.

Often treated as a qualitative method but regarded as a way of life by those who practice it, autoethnography begins with a belief in the power of stories to capture the complexities of social life (Adams et al., 2015; Denzin, 2014). Although autoethnography

and performative writing are now regarded as important and legitimate methods within the communication discipline, since the 1980s scholars have had to challenge dominant notions of research that center on the scientific method and post-positivist thinking. In order to believe that social science can benefit from narrative, we have to first adopt some assumptions about research; namely, that there is no objective truth but rather a multitude of subjective lived experiences, that researchers cannot emotionally divorce themselves from their research, and that meaning is complex, is constantly being (re)constructed through interaction, and is therefore unstable (Adams et al., 2015). As a result of these assumptions, autoethnographers avoid making “generalizable” claims across populations, are conscious of and transparent about their position within their subject matter, use evocative language, narrative, and aesthetic practices to access the affective dimension of their research, and recognize the value in studying mundane lived experiences since these often contribute to meaning making in significant ways (Adams et al., 2015; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

In addition to a focus on narrative and lived experience, autoethnography values accessibility, reader response, cultural critique, reflexivity, and sense-making using a broad range of approaches from writing, co-writing, staged performances, dance, and music (Adams et al., 2015; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Through engaging, and often creative, writing, representing under-represented stories, utilizing familiar narrative forms, and exploring forms beyond text, autoethnographers present research that is not only more accessible to broad audiences, but is often tailored to the cultural and communication needs of audiences outside of the academy (Adams et al., 2015). In making research more accessible, researchers can also begin to open space for audience

identification and response, since in the familiar forms audiences are able to empathize with the familiar experiences (Pelias, 2014).

Scholars have been quick to develop, but slow to come to consensus on, criteria for evaluating interpretive qualitative research in order to retain rigor within the discipline (Tracy, 2010). Because of the postpositivist stigma of criteria, many scholars have resisted the adoption of specific characteristics, instead opting for broad qualities that leave room for creativity, innovation, and playfulness. Richardson (2000) suggests that creative analytic practices can be held to high standards by asking if the research makes a substantive contribution to the literature, has aesthetic merit, is self-reflexive, impacts the audience, and embodies an expression of reality. Ellingson (2009) suggests that qualitative research can benefit from a crystallization approach that uses thick description, the use of multiple and diverse approaches to collecting, interpreting, and representing research, research reflexivity, and a worldview that rejects postpositivism. Adams et al. (2015) offer “prescriptive goals” rather than criteria, and they are making contributions to knowledge, valuing personal experiences, demonstrating the craft and power of storytelling, and taking a “relationally responsible approach to research and practice.” Tracy (2010) suggests that qualitative research can be evaluated by determining whether the research is guided by a worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, and ethics, and makes a significant contribution while maintaining meaningful coherence.

Given that art is an important aspect of creative analytic practices (Richardson, 2000), and my own dual identity as a researcher and musician, I will use this thesis to advance the concept of music composition as a method of inquiry. Writing music as a

method of inquiry is in keeping with Richardson's (2000) discussion of writing as a method of inquiry. The songwriting or composing process has the same potential to reveal new knowledge or understanding, generate evocative representations, and engage the listener's body that poetry or creative prose do. To adapt Richardson's statement on writing, "I [compose] because I want to find something out. I [compose] in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it" (p. 924). Ellingson (2009) includes music as a potential approach to the qualitative method of crystallization, and Bartleet and Ellis (2009) present autoethnographies about music and being a musician.

Despite cultural myths that regard music as a "universal language" (Bonds, 1991), Rickert and Byrons (1999) assert that "only language speaks." Mio (2005) resists the idea that music cannot communicate research by using music composition to supplement autoethnographic research. The lack of research employing music as a method is not justification for a continued avoidance of the musical medium given that music is one of the "available means of persuasion" that scholars can access to communicate research (VanKooten, 2011). Songwriting is perhaps the most obvious musical method for communicating research, since autoethnographic or performative text can be set to music that helps set a mood, evoke emotions, and inspire the imagination of an audience.

Autoethnography "connects the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739), performance "turns the personal into the political and the political into the personal" (Pelias, 2014, p. 15), and music "is an active force in composing new relations, new evocations...between culture and individuals" (Rickert & Byron, 1999). Each of these is a method for connecting embodied knowledge to greater systems and structures.



The idea that knowledge must first be experienced through the body is central to how Lefebvre (2004) insists analysts must experience and make sense of everyday rhythms.

### **Rhythmanalysis**

Given that mobilities is focused on external movements and interactions (Edensor, 2011), and autoethnography values personal, embodied experiences (Adams et al., 2015), they are not immediately complimentary approaches. Rhythmanalysis provides the foundation for the harmonious combination of these two seemingly contradictory orientations. The concept of rhythm in social research and philosophy has enjoyed varying popularity and repetition over the years, but much like rhythm itself, each repetition has an element of something new and unforeseen — of difference (Crespi, 2014; Henriques, Tiainen, & Väliaho, 2014; Lefebvre, 2004). Despite the long and varying tradition of studying rhythm across disciplines, Lefebvre's (2004) *Rhythmanalysis* remains the most influential conceptualization of rhythm as a method and orientation (Crespi, 2014; Henriques et al., 2014).

First published in English in 2004, Lefebvre draws upon the earlier ideas of Nietzsche, dos Santos — to whom he attributes the creation of the term 'rhythmanalysis' — and Bachelard, but seeks to develop the meaning and practice of rhythmanalysis, or the "rhythmanalytical project," more fully than his predecessors (Lefebvre, 2004). In laying out rhythmanalysis, Lefebvre first discusses the nature of rhythm as existing "everywhere there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy" (p. 25). These three concepts — place, time, and energy or action — make up what Lefebvre refers to as the "triumvirate." Because of the pervasiveness of rhythm, Lefebvre stresses the importance of the quotidian, or everyday, focus of rhythmanalysis (Edensor,

2011; Fen, 2012; Gräbner, 2011; Lefebvre, 2004; Zayani, 1999). The “gaze and the intellect” are all that are needed to “grasp directly some aspects of our reality that are rich in meaning: notably the everyday and rhythms,” so in addition to a quotidian focus, rhythmanalysis emphasizes a sensual understanding that takes into account smell, taste, and feel in addition to sight and sound (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 25).

Adopting a sensual approach to understanding requires the rhythmanalyst, or agent, to regard the body as the primary point of rhythm expression and interpretation (Lefebvre, 2004). Rhythm unites quantitative and qualitative features by appearing as “regulated time, governed by rational laws, but in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body” (p. 18). The rhythmanalyst, in order to make sense of rhythm, must tap into the qualitative aspects of rhythm, those connected to the body, first:

The rhythmanalyst will listen to the world, and above all to what are disdainfully called noises, which are said without meaning, and to murmurs, full of meaning — and finally he will listen to silences...He listens — and first to his body; he learns rhythm from it, in order consequently to appreciate external rhythms. His body serves him as a metronome. (p. 29).

This emphasis on the individual body means that rhythms must be lived through in order to be understood, but Lefebvre complicates this by saying that the rhythmanalyst must be somewhat outside of the rhythms in order to analyze them (Fen, 2012; Lefebvre, 2004). Lefebvre famously exemplifies this by conducting rhythmanalysis of a Paris street from a balcony several stories above, as he seeks to find meaning in the seemingly chaotic rhythms that make up the experience of the place. By analyzing the rhythms from the

balcony, Lefebvre is simultaneously inside and outside of the production of rhythm — he is close enough to sense the rhythms below and is removed enough to observe the interactions between energy, space, and time.

Lefebvre's analysis from the balcony calls attention to another theme of rhythmanalysis: the mobile (Edensor, 2011; Fen, 2012; Lefebvre, 2004). Lefebvre states that for the rhythmanalyst, "nothing is immobile" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 30), and his attention to the street and intersection below betray an interest in "mobile places," or those places between destinations where co-travelers are temporarily united as they pass through (Fen, 2012). Fen expands the potential for rhythmanalysis to understand mobile places by incorporating the idea of atmosphere — the felt presence or experience of place that attunes individuals to the environment. Atmosphere of mobile places is largely produced and experienced through rhythm.

Edensor (2011), however, is concerned that a focus on mobile places leads to a narrow enactment of rhythmanalysis, and that instead the analyst should focus on the "mobile experience of space." He exemplifies this by studying the rhythms of commuting where place, rather than being conceived of as static location, is experienced as "the passing of familiar fixtures under the same and different conditions of travel" (p. 191). While the concept of atmosphere (Fen, 2012) is useful in understanding how rhythm can produce a collective experience, Edensor's emphasis on mobile experiences rather than mobile places allows for a freer exploration of mobility on the road. Edensor (2011) and Fen (2012) provide two key examples of the deliberate combination of mobilities with rhythmanalysis, but not all scholars are as explicit in their use of these orientation themes. In the following section I will discuss how mobilities, creative analytic practices, and

rhythmanalysis can be complimentary, and how scholars have implicitly benefited from this constellation.

### **Bringing It All Together**

The themes of mobility in *Rhythmanalysis* (Lefebvre, 2004) have led scholars to explore how mobilities studies can benefit from a rhythmanalytical approach (Edensor, 2011; Fen, 2012). Much of the existing research using rhythmanalysis for either explicit or implicit mobilities studies is on urban spaces (McEachern, Warnaby, & Cheetham, 2012; Vergunst, 2010; Wunderlich, 2008). Taking a similar approach as Bull (2004), Labelle (2008) explores how rhythm is experienced, produced, and manipulated in the car, and how, when cars are stylized to provide a specific rhythmic experience, they can become symbols of belonging in the lowrider and hiphop cultures.

In addition to clear topics of mobilities, rhythmanalysis has also been used to better understand aesthetic practices. Gräbner (2011) challenges Lefebvre's assertion that the poet and the rhythm analyst are separate, and that the poet works outside temporality and the rhythm analyst within it, by examining performed poetry, which places poetry within the temporal and sensual realms of understanding. Graham (2015) uses rhythmanalysis and visual art to explore how the moving present — the simultaneous interaction of time, space, and energy — can be recorded through drawing. Aesthetic practices have also been used to better understand rhythmanalysis, such as Bennett's (2015) use of photo diaries to reveal rhythms of everyday life.

Studies such as Bennett's (2015) show how methods consistent with autoethnography are being employed with rhythmanalysis or mobilities, but are not always clearly labeled as such. Noy's (2009) autoethnography about driving his daughter

to school builds arguments around transitory space, mobility, and the importance of the mundane, but does not explicitly name mobilities or rhythmanalysis as guiding theories or methods. In this sense, my approach itself is not novel, but my explicit use of the terms “autoethnography,” “mobilities,” and “rhythmanalysis” in conjunction is.

Autoethnography and music composition are distinctly mobile methods that scholars can use to “capture” fleeting concepts and interactions. Because mobilities is focused on the external world of people and objects in space (Cresswell, 2006), and autoethnography and music start from a place of self-reflexivity (Adams et al., 2015), it is helpful to contextualize the use of these methods within the orientation of rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 2004). This constellation of orientations puts primacy on the self — specifically the researcher’s body — and uses the understandings born in the body to interpret external, social, or material phenomena (Fen, 2012; Lefebvre, 2004), guiding the researcher through a process of cultural critique that places the self within a larger context of cultural, social, political, and interpersonal movement. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate this constellation in practice, but before moving on I will offer clarification on two of Lefebvre’s (2004) most significant concepts — the present and presence.

### **Present and Presence on the Open Road**

One of Lefebvre’s (2004) most essential, yet nebulous, concepts is the distinction between present and presence. The *present*, according to Lefebvre, is “open, evident, here and there” (p. 32). It can take on different affects, but looked at in isolation the “innocence and cruelty” of the present is its tendency to imitate *presence* to the point of becoming simulacra: “a parody of *presence*” (p. 33). *Presence* is able to “survive” this

fabrication by “imposing itself by introducing a rhythm.” If *present* is the sensible, the material, the immediately observable, *presence* is the orchestration of the present — of things — into something more evocative, and it can only be encountered through rhythmanalysis:

The act of rhythmanalysis transforms everything into presences, including the present, grasped and perceived as such ... Rhythmanalysis integrates these things...in a dramatic becoming, in an ensemble full of meaning, transforming them no longer into diverse things, but into presences. (p. 33)

What this suggests is that if we examine only the immediately observable — the curves of the road, the route, the surrounding ecosystem, the time of day — our analysis will result in a simulacra, “a portrait, a copy, a facsimile,” of the perceived “magic” of the road. By using rhythmanalysis, the *present*, when analyzed alongside the rhythms of interactions between things, can be transformed into *presence*. *Presence* is understood here as a sublime moment of transcendence, of an authentic encounter with place that goes beyond the logical mixture of things. The following chapter will explore moments of *present* and *presence* on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

## CHAPTER 3

### **The Rhythm of the Road**

*We came around a curve and the land emptied into an endless cerulean sky that took our breath away as it blew white clouds over green hills and blue mountains. A red gate stood guard over a green pasture where hay bales dried in the summer sun. It was the perfect pastoral painting of simple, agrarian Appalachian life. We were passing through the Asheville watershed where off-road parking is not permitted, but we could not leave without admiring the beauty so I stopped dead in the road, put the truck in neutral, and stepped out to become a part of the scenery: the way the road curved perfectly into, and back out of view, the rusty red of the gate, green of the pasture, and white of the Queen Anne's lace, the afternoon sun that left no room for shadows, and of course the mountains, lined up like crayons in a box, shifting hues further and further until the eye could hardly discern summit from sky.*

I experienced this moment of *presence* (Lefebvre, 2004) during a five-day road trip down the entire 469-mile length of the Blue Ridge Parkway from Rockfish Gap in Virginia to Cherokee, North Carolina. Somewhere along the Parkway's decreasing radius curves, as we cruised uphill, coasted downhill, and rolled across the plateau at 45 miles-per-hour, something changed. Our orientation to nature, to time, to life, shifted to something greater, something slower, and something more humble. We had fallen into the rhythm of the road.

This chapter will seek to understand that unique rhythm — how it differs from the quotidian, how it embodies and encourages the romanticizing of the “road trip,” and how visitors interact, adopt, and improvise within it. I argue that the Blue Ridge Parkway can

be considered a cultural artifact worthy of rhetorical analysis because the environment along the Parkway — the route, curves, vistas, and interpretive sites — were all designed for the optimum motoring experience, and those design choices were highly influenced by prevailing cultural mythology about the history of Appalachia, notions of landscape design that privileged scenery over history, and 19<sup>th</sup> century standards of aesthetic beauty and the picturesque (Myers, 2006; Noblitt, 1994; Whisnant, 2008). These choices are in line with Burke's conception of rhetoric as the "transformative experience of identification" (Clarke, 2004), and Bitzer's (1968) assertion that "rhetoric is a mode of altering reality." While such a broad understanding of rhetoric does carry some risk for the discipline (Gaonkar, 1993), there is also the potential for gain by adopting an applied rhetorical approach (Condit & Bates, 2009) that uses rhetorical autoethnography (Lunceford, 2015) and art (Buckland et al., 2012, p. 100-101) to provide a crystallization (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson, 2000) of interpretations that expands how we think of texts, analysis, and both everyday and exceptional encounters with cultural landscapes (Clarke, 2004).

To begin, I will first discuss the relevant literature surrounding non-traditional rhetorical analysis. Following this, I will give a brief history of the Blue Ridge Parkway and contextualize it within a tradition that represents Appalachia as the last frontier for the American pioneer who lives an isolated, georgic lifestyle (Garrard, 2012). I will then provide a section of narrative about my experiences on the Parkway and a song written about traveling the Parkway after conducting research on its history, American car culture, and environmental communication. I will conclude by discussing the



implications of each of these interpretations — the scholarly, the narrative, and the artistic — on how we experience and interact with the Blue Ridge Parkway.

### **Setting Out**

Rhetoric and rhetorical studies are generally concerned with persuasion, but as rhetorical theory has developed, scholars have sought to either narrow or broaden rhetoric's scope (Lucaites & Condit, 1999). For the purposes of this thesis, it is necessary to adopt a broader definition that makes space for the Blue Ridge Parkway (BRP) as a persuasive artifact. Aristotle's definition of rhetoric as "the faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion" sets up rhetoric as an art in its own right that is applicable to, but not concerned with, any specialized subjects (*Rhet.* 1.2, 1355b, trans. Freese). This definition has relevance for this particular study given its use to justify music as a mode of rhetoric (VanKooten, 2011) and because it allows for the landscape architect's design choices to be considered as rhetorical choices — or choices that lead to persuasive outcomes, particularly regarding identification (Burke, 1945; Clarke, 2004).

Although positioning rhetoric as a "hermeneutic metadiscourse" that is capable of interpreting almost anything rhetorically has drawn criticism (Gaonkar, 1993), there are multiple examples of scholars pushing the boundaries of rhetoric and what counts as a rhetorical text (Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991; Foss, 2004; Hattenhauer, 1984). In addition to written or orally delivered verbal texts, scholars have looked at architecture and monuments (Blair et al., 1991; Hattenhauer, 1984), visual images and arguments (Foss, 2004), music — including lyrics and musical structure — (Cloud & Feyh, 2015; Jakes, 2013), protest displays and tours (Pezzullo, 2003), maps and trails (Senda-Cook,

2013), and roads and urban spaces (Topinka, 2012; Wood, 2010) rhetorically. These examples provide the justification for including musical score (Jakes, 2013), critically examining architecture (Blair et al., 1991; Hattenhauer, 1984; Topinka, 2012; Wood, 2010), and using non-traditional methods such as rhetorical field studies (Senda-Cook, 2013), applied rhetorical practices (Condit & Bates, 2009), or rhetorical autoethnography (Lunceford, 2015).

Adopting Condit and Bates' (2009) orientation, I place criticism within the concept of "applied research," and strive to place my scholarship on the "more applied" end of the research spectrum. I will do this by writing in an approachable and relatable style, using story and narrative to draw in the reader, and incorporating music that pairs critical text with traditional musical tropes — all of which fall within the traditions of autoethnography and performative writing (Adams, et al 2015; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Lunceford, 2015; Pelias, 2014). While these are not traditional rhetorical methods, they can help capture the "messy complexities" of daily life (Pezzullo, 2003) and provide a means for examining the reactions and emotions of the audience, given that these approaches place the critic as the audience (Lunceford, 2015). While highlighting the subjectivity of the critic goes against traditional rhetorical practices, it allows critics to examine the historicity and continuous nature of rhetorical artifacts.

There are some guidelines that critics should follow when conducting research from such non-traditional orientations. In order to make research more applied, Condit & Bates (2009) argue that scholars should speak to audiences outside of academia, and adopt the rhetorical forms, assumptions, and vocabularies familiar to those audiences. To be considered rhetorical, scholarship should examine a text, be guided by theory, engage

in evaluation, and strive to produce change in the world (Condit & Bates, 2009), and to be considered rigorous, it should be honest, well written, engaging, reflexive, and ethical (Lunceford, 2015; Tracy, 2010). For scholars wishing to speak to audiences both within and outside of academia simultaneously, a prism approach (Lunceford, 2015; Senda-Cook, 2013) or crystallization approach (Ellingson, 2009; Richardson, 2000) can be useful since more traditional methods of analysis can be combined with field methods, autoethnography, or other creative analytic processes that might be more accessible to an average audience.

Traveling the BRP is not only a rhetorical experience, but also a public experience (Clarke, 2004). The Parkway, as a conceptual landscape rather than just material land, functions rhetorically in the broadest sense: as a series of symbols that (re)create a “concept of national community” that individuals identify and claim as their own. In this way, there is Blue Ridge Parkway the road — the material structure, the land — and Blue Ridge Parkway the “road” — the symbolic concept, the landscape (Clarke, 2004; Wood, 2012). The material features, the road, provide the basis for travelers to also experience the symbolic aspects, the “road.” The symbolic (re)constitutes a common version of American identity, in this case the origin myth of the mountain pioneer. This common identity, and travelers’ identification with it, constitutes the public experience (Clarke, 2004). Because of the intangible quality of the “road,” I will adopt a crystallization approach that seeks to understand the BRP by examining it from multiple angles: an analysis of the National Park Service’s design and management of the Parkway, a narrative anecdote of my own experience traveling the parkway, and a song written after traveling and researching the Parkway.

### **The Blue Ridge Parkway**

The Blue Ridge Parkway is a 469-mile limited-access road connecting Shenandoah National Park in Virginia to the Great Smokey Mountains National Park in North Carolina (National Park Service, 2015). The park encompasses 82,000 acres along three major mountain ranges, and is one of the most biologically diverse attractions within the National Park Service (NPS) with 600 miles of streams, over 450 species of animals, and 2,074 plant species, including 24 plant communities considered globally rare and seven of which are considered globally imperiled (Johnson, 2015). Begun in 1935 and finished in 1987, the Parkway was a New Deal project that utilized labor from the Works Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps. Once completed, it became the largest road planned as a single unit in the United States, and it has consistently been the most visited site in the National Park System since 1946, with over 17 million visitors annually (National Park Service, 2015). The Parkway has 36 percent of the tunnels and ten percent of the bridges in the NPS, 382 overlook and parking areas, 91 historic buildings, and 910 maintained roadside vistas (Johnson, 2015).

The National Park Service, led by Stanley Abbott and R. Getty Browning, when planning and constructing the Parkway in the 1930s adopted the dominant folk myth about Appalachia: the pioneer (Noblitt, 1994; Whisnant, 2006; 2008). Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Americans had explored the entire continent, and that great frontier the American west, had lost its mystery among modern development. As a result, Americans (re)situated the pioneer in the Appalachian mountains (Noblitt, 1994). Edward Abbuehl, a landscape architect during the Parkway's early days, commented on the perceived

isolation of Appalachia by asserting that “an ‘outlander’ seeing this country for the first time must pinch himself to be certain that he is still in the Twentieth Century” (p. 398).

Adopting the myth of the Appalachian pioneer is problematic because it erases the long and conflicted history of industrialization in the region (McGuire, 2010; Whisnant, 2006). The timber and coal industries had already created environmental and health problems for the region’s inhabitants by the 1930s; for example, timber companies clear cut mountain forests leading to widespread erosion (Noblitt, 1994). Parkway designers misrepresented history by ignoring these industries, instead depicting a self-sufficient isolated mountain life where poor land management by mountain inhabitants was to blame for erosion, rather than the timber industry.

The Caudill Cabin, an interpretive site at milepost 241 in Allegheny county North Carolina, is just one example of how the National Park Service has propagated this myth (McGuire, 2010). The NPS acquired Caudill Cabin in 1938, which began a series of misattributions and misrepresentations of its original inhabitants. Though Caudill Cabin now stands alone, it was once a part of the Basin Cove community. The Basin Creek Union Baptist Church was at the heart of the community, and residents regularly gathered to worship, socialize, and attend school. Residents also regularly traveled to the nearby cities of Wilkesboro, Mt. Airy, and Winston in order to sell crops and buy needed supplies, and to Abshers, where the closest post office and general store were located. Despite this established network of travel and communication, the NPS’s first interpretations of the site represented the Caudill Cabin as an example of simple, isolated pioneer life. Though the interpretive sign has changed over the years to reflect the actual inhabitants of the cabin and to acknowledge the tragic 1916 flood that quite literally

washed away the community of Basin Cove, the myth of the pioneer is still present even in the labeling of the location as a “homestead.”

All along the Parkway, the NPS altered, removed, or added structures in order to preserve the myth of the pioneer. At Mabry Mill (Figure 1), the Park Service demolished the Mabry’s clapboard farm house, replaced it with a log cabin brought in from another county, removed evidence of the sawmill the Mabry’s had built and run, and instead highlighted exhibits on “mountain industry” such as Mabry’s blacksmith shop, a whiskey still, and a sorghum press (Noblitt, 1994; Whisnant, 2008). At the Peaks of Otter, the NPS tore down a popular resort because of its modern appearance, and instead erased all traces that the area had previously been frequented by locals and tourists alike (Whisnant, 2006; 2008). In addition to these changes, the Parkway also functions to conceal the many residents who had their land taken through eminent domain and were displaced from the areas they and their families had occupied and managed for years (Hall & FRIENDS, 2007; Noblitt, 1994; Whisnant, 2006; 2008). Displacing residents and altering the history of the land were acceptable practices given the 1930s equation of nature with the scenic.

### **The Parkway and Nature**

During the 1930s, Americans orientation to nature and public lands privileged the scenic over the historic, the natural, or the wild (Louter, 2009; Noblitt, 1994). This orientation provided the justification for the construction of park roads and parkways, since if nature is equated with the scenic then roads and nature can co-exist in a supportive harmony (Louter, 2009). While the harmonious coexistence of roads and nature seems odd given our current operationalization of nature as wilderness, where

wilderness is land that is untouched by humans (Garrard, 2012), this was the dominant ideology of the NPS in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. That ideology has shifted over time, and throughout the 1970s and 1980s the NPS made efforts to reinterpret historical sites more accurately, but the BRP and its pioneer themes have themselves become something of a historical site that supporters argue are worth maintaining, and the NPS has not restored sites to their original appearance. (McGuire, 2010; Noblitt, 1994; Whisnant, 2006; 2008).

By preserving a version of nature that is primarily scenic and mediated by the windows of an automobile, the BRP promotes something that Louter (2009) terms “windshield wilderness.” While traditional encounters with wilderness generally entail being alone in vast natural landscapes (Garrard, 2012), windshield wilderness is the belief that one can have an authentic encounter with nature simply by viewing framed scenery from behind a windshield (Louter, 2009). If the Blue Ridge Parkway is thought of as a place of windshield wilderness, then its relationship with nature becomes that of a picture frame or canvas upon which nature is presented to viewers (Noblitt, 1994). Travelers, then, become both audience and subject as they view and are viewed in various scenic vistas seen through windshields, and viewing along the Parkway becomes a sort of collective identity-constituting activity. In the following section, I provide a narrative of my own identity-constituting experience on the BRP.

### **Driving the Blue Ridge Parkway**

*“Country air is so much cooler than city air. There’s none of them...traffic, or houses...”* My grandfather’s words come to mind as the mountain air rushes in through the open windows. We haven’t seen another car for at least a half hour, and we are content to let the wind and bluegrass music drift around the cabin of my 1996 Ford

pickup truck. I leave the truck in third gear as long as I can, even as the engine whines downhill and rumbles uphill. Every few miles the road rises steeply and I stretch my left leg to push in the clutch and shift down to second. We are at our leisure, pausing every few miles to try and capture the breathtaking mountain scenery on our phones so we can relive it later, but try as we might, our photos never quite capture the many hues of the mountains.

We have a vague destination, but no set arrival time or itinerary. My friend reads the Blue Ridge Parkway travel guide we picked up at the James River visitor center and suggests places we could stop and hike, tour, or shop. Some of our stops are sudden, like visiting Mabry Mill. As we come around a bend in the road, the trees open up to a cabin with a large waterwheel that empties into a small, reflective pond. “Should we stop?” I ask, slowing only slightly. “I don’t know...” my friend replies reluctantly, likely battling interest with hunger as it is suppertime. “Let’s stop,” I decide, turning the wheel sharply so that we don’t miss the entrance to the parking lot. We wander the exhibit, casually reading the signs that talk about the Mabry family, walking the trails along the rebuilt millrace, and watching the waterwheel periodically fill, turn, and splash its contents into the pond. There is a feeling of reverence, or intrusion, that keeps us silent and contemplative — air rushes through our vocal folds without vibrating as we whisper words of admiration and awe at the difficulty of life one hundred years ago. Both sides of my family are from Appalachia, and I wonder if my great grandparents lived lives like the Mabry’s: hard, self-sufficient, humble.

I stand at the edge of the pond, counting the seconds between the creaks and splash of the waterwheel, and feel a sense of déjà vu. Is this scene familiar because it is a



common depiction of Appalachian life? Did I see a picture in the Blue Ridge Parkway guide pamphlet? I realize belatedly that I have seen Mabry Mill before, though not in a guidebook. For years, a painting of the Mill, done by my grandmother before she began showing symptoms of Alzheimer's, hung in our house. After our trip, I would ask when my grandmother had visited Mabry Mill, and was told that she likely had not visited but had painted it based on a picture she had seen.

When we get back into the truck, we both relax knowing that our next stop will be our campsite. The sun is starting its slow descent behind the mountains; we had planned to make camp before sunset but ended up staying a few hours at the Arnold Valley Pool, stuck in conversation with a local man and his son who regularly visited the swimming hole. I run my hands through stream-washed hair, remembering the sweet taste of the spring-fed pool, and any regrets I might have had about "running late" are erased as we watch our second Blue Ridge Parkway sunset. Once again, the Parkway reminds me that I am in the right place at the right time, no matter what "schedule" I had hoped to keep.

"I thought I might be homesick on this trip, since we're sleeping on the ground and mainly staying in your truck during the day. And then I thought, no, because your truck is our home this week. But even that wasn't right. I realized the Blue Ridge Parkway is our home." My friend muses. She is more caught up in the "magic" of our road trip than I am. "Everything feels right — I haven't showered, I'm not wearing any makeup, and those guys last night *still* flirted with us! They were totally into us for us — we were so authentically ourselves, and they were into it."

“It gives me hope, that maybe if I can be myself here, I could be myself all the time.” I agree, thinking back to the two guys we had shared a campfire with the night before. “And honestly, I still feel like such a badass for having a better fire than them.”

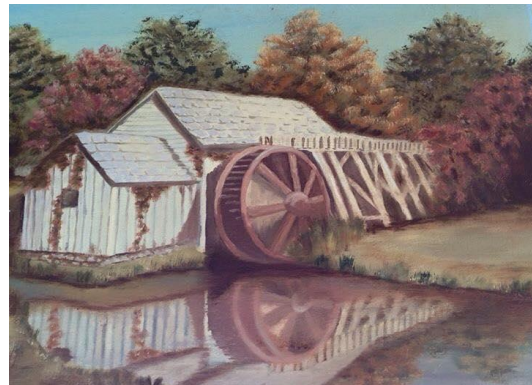
“That’s because you are! And they were so impressed at how quickly we set up camp.”

“Well, the real test will be setting it up after dark tonight...”

When we finally climb into our sleeping bags, surprised at how cold it is for a summer night, I think of my friend’s words and realize she is right — I am more at home sleeping on the ground in Fancy Gap, Virginia than I have ever been in my actual apartment. The wind rushes through the trees behind us and pushes against the thin nylon tent. I am lulled to sleep by the sound of the wind and the not-so-distant rush of cars along nearby Interstate 77.

*No matter where you’re going, you can’t get away from the hum and the roar of the old highway. You can drive the open road till you don’t know where you are, but it always turns out you didn’t go that far. I got the East Coast road trip blues...*

**Figure 1: (Left) A photo I took of Mabry Mill in August, 2015. (Right) A photo of my grandmother’s painting of Mabry Mill**



### **The Parkway in Song**

On the following pages, I have included the score to the song “Parkway,” which I wrote while researching National Park roads and the BRP, and critically reflecting on my own experiences traveling it. For reading convenience, I have included the text to the song below, but the stress and tempo of how the lyrics should be read can be inferred from the spacing within the music.

Carry me back to the road between the trees, the oak, birch, and evergreens,  
Where age-worn bark breaks the mountain breeze  
Preserving a history told in rings.

Wind me round, slow me down, put postcards on my windshield.  
Send me home with tales of hilltops and nature’s truths revealed.

Carry me back to the road between the trees, the oak, birch, and evergreens.  
Where the road meets the wild with grace and ease,  
Preserving a history, a story we want to believe.

Wind me round, slow me down, put postcards on my windshield.  
Send me home with tales of hilltops and nature’s truths revealed.

Score

## Parkway

Speed Limit 45 mph

The musical score for 'Parkway' is written in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part consists of a steady eighth-note bass line and a treble line with chords and occasional eighth-note figures. The vocal line includes lyrics and musical notation with slurs and a triplet.

9 Car-ry me back to back to the road

16 be - tween the trees the oak and the birch oh, and the

2

## Parkway

23  
ev - er - green  
Where age - worn bark breaks moun - tain  
Where the road meets the wild with grace and

30  
breeze pre - serv - ing a his - tory a his - tory  
ease pre - serv - ing a his - tory a sto - ry

36  
told in rings  
we want to be - lieve

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It features a treble and bass staff for the piano accompaniment and a single staff for the voice. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 23-29) includes the lyrics 'ev - er - green' and 'Where age - worn bark breaks moun - tain / Where the road meets the wild with grace and'. The second system (measures 30-35) includes the lyrics 'breeze pre - serv - ing a his - tory a his - tory' and 'ease pre - serv - ing a his - tory a sto - ry'. The third system (measures 36-41) includes the lyrics 'told in rings' and 'we want to be - lieve'. The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a moving bass line in the left hand. There are some corrections in the original image, such as 'breaks' instead of 'break' and 'sto - ry' instead of 'sto - ry'.

## Parkway

3

43

Wind me round slow me

50

down put post-cardson my windshieldsendme home withtalesof hilltops and na-ture'strutte-vealed

57

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It is in the key of D major (two sharps) and 4/4 time. The score is divided into three systems. The first system starts at measure 43, with the vocal line entering with the lyrics 'Wind me round slow me'. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and chords in the right hand. The second system starts at measure 50, with the vocal line continuing the lyrics 'down put post-cardson my windshieldsendme home withtalesof hilltops and na-ture'strutte-vealed'. A triplet of eighth notes is marked above the vocal line. The piano accompaniment continues with similar harmonic support. The third system starts at measure 57, where the vocal line has a whole rest, and the piano accompaniment concludes the phrase with a sustained chord in the right hand and a moving bass line.

### Reflections

Having approached the Parkway from a critical perspective, I experienced many moments of the *present* — moments where I confronted reality — and *presence* — moments of sublime, authentic encounters (Lefebvre, 2004). I experienced the *present* when I remembered the environmental costs of building and maintaining a road through some of the highest elevations in Virginia and North Carolina, the residents who were displaced or inconvenienced by its construction, the animal and insect populations disturbed by its use, and the carelessness and disregard of its users who leave behind litter on the road shoulder and trails. I experienced *presence* at many of the overlooks, at Mabry Mill, each evening at sunset while driving, at the Arnold Valley Pool, in our tent each night, and at the hikes we took at Linville Falls, Craggy Dome, and Waterrock Knob. If I were to quantify the ratio of moments of *present* to *presence* I experienced on the Parkway portion of our trip compared to the Interstate portion of our trip, I would find a significant difference between the two, with a higher occurrence of moments of *presence* on the Parkway than the Interstate.

Is this alone enough to explain the “magic” of the Parkway? Perhaps not, but a further exploration of rhythms along the Parkway may help provide some depth and complexity. In analyzing rhythms, Lefebvre (2004) insists that the analyst must first take into account the intimate rhythms of his or her body since these provide a reference point by which to gauge the external rhythms of the world. Though Lefebvre does not say so explicitly, it is reasonable to believe that he, as a Marxist, would argue that external rhythms that more closely resemble the intimate rhythms of the body could be considered more natural. Traveling the Blue Ridge Parkway by vehicle is still far from natural, given

that a typical body can walk about three miles-per-hour and the vehicle speed limit on the Parkway is 45 miles-per-hour, but the experience is still closer to natural than the Interstate where speed limits range from 55 to 70 miles-per-hour in Virginia and North Carolina and are constantly surpassed by lead-footed drivers. Along the Parkway, visitor centers and campsites open early and close at sunset each day, and close during the cold months, following the natural, cosmic rhythms of the circadian rhythm of humans, the rotation of the earth on its axis, and the revolution of the earth around the sun.

In my experience along the Parkway, these more natural rhythms meant that we felt freer to be more natural in all of our expressions of self: in how we dressed, acted, and even how we spoke, as our natural “southern” accents flourished within the cultural rhythms of Appalachia. The comfort and freedom we experienced on the Parkway contrasted sharply with our experiences off the Parkway, primarily on the Interstates and in downtown Asheville. The faster rhythm and cultural expectations regarding beauty and behavior were so off-putting that even after having to get a hotel room for the afternoon due to a medical emergency, we opted to hit the road and find a campsite that night because the generic “comfort” of the hotel was too forced, too sterile, too constructed.

The Blue Ridge Parkway lives up to our expectation of the perfect road trip. It winds through a rural landscape, has little enough traffic that drivers can often go several miles without seeing another vehicle, provides quintessentially American experiences with views of log cabins and mountains that call to mind the lyrics of “America the Beautiful.” Beneath the romantic surface, the Blue Ridge Parkway conceals how constructed it is, and what was sacrificed for the American identity experienced and adopted along its twists and turns. In my analysis of the NPS’s construction and



management of the Parkway, I highlight a few areas that were transformed to fit the pioneer narrative of Appalachia, and in the narrative I tell about my interactions with one of these areas, but in the song I approach this more generally.

The song is especially inspired by Louter's (2009) concept of "windshield wilderness," and songs such as John Denver's "Take Me Home, Country Roads." The lyrics attempt to combine the ideas of the more traditional analysis with those of the autoethnography, albeit in a shorter, more artistic form. In the first verse, "Where age-worn bark breaks the mountain breeze," refers to a quote by Carpenter Kendall about how the sound of his engine was "muffled against the dense wall of trees," allowing him to experience the air "heavy with silence, as of prayer" (p. 31). The second verse "where the road meets the wild with grace and ease," references a 1928 *Saturday Evening Post* story by Horace Albright espousing the extraordinary ability of park roads to "not only reveal the landscape; they become a part of it as well" (p. 59). The last line of each verse, "preserving a history told in rings," and "preserving a history we want to believe," reference the undeniable evidence of environmental damage preserved within trees (Baes & McLaughlin, 1984), and our ability to deny that in favor of more entertaining and enjoyable historic narratives.

The chorus voices a present-day look at how we interact with the Parkway as being slower and more picturesque than our everyday lives. The line "nature's truth revealed" is meant to be somewhat cynical given that the Parkway has the most designed landscape of any parkway in the U.S. (Johnson, 2015), and is therefore far from "nature's truth." The text of the song is at times contrasted or supported by a somewhat wistful melody for the verse and a slightly more cheery melody and harmonic structure for the

chorus. The form follows the simple ABAB structure common to songs from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Parkway was designed, which is also meant to evoke the feelings of an earlier time when pollution, habitat fragmentation, and fragile ecosystems mattered less than human enjoyment of nature (Louter, 2009).

One of the motivations for incorporating art in the form of narrative and music is to encourage personal reflection on the part of the reader who may draw conclusions beyond what I could have intended (Buckland et al., 2012). For this reason, I do not wish to conclude with any remaining interpretations of my analyses, but will instead turn to some implications for using a crystallization method when conducting rhetorical criticism. A crystallization approach was appropriate given the use of a non-traditional rhetorical artifact and my own goals of producing applied scholarship (Condit & Bates, 2009) that acknowledges and is reflexive of my own interpretation and experiences with the artifact (Lunceford, 2015). While the analysis is most complete when all three parts are presented together, they are also meant to be accessible to different populations who may relate to one form over another and for that reason could also be said to exist as independent interpretations of the same artifact and concepts. Some limitations to this approach are that the research may appear fragmented or repetitive due to the multiple modes of analysis, and forms such as song may lead to more general interpretations that are incapable of communicating complex, artifact-specific ideas without significant context.

Using a crystallization or prismatic approach to the Blue Ridge Parkway helped reveal how the Parkway is more similar to the cosmic, corporeal rhythms of the body and natural world, how exhibits of log cabins and pioneer life work to construct an American

frontier identity, how maintained overlooks and a rural mountain environment provide numerous moments to experience *presence* along the Parkway, and how these all work together to limit moments of the present which would require visitors to confront the harsh realities of eminent domain, environmental degradation, and belief in an isolated, backwards, poor, uneducated Appalachian culture that are part of a more realistic history of the Appalachian region and the Parkway.

## CHAPTER 4

### **A Tank Full of Wishful Thinking**

This chapter is a series of scenes, thoughts, memories, and experiences about driving. They are represented using poetry, narrative, and song, and take a critical stance on the role of driving in our everyday lives. Connecting these seemingly unconnected moments are lyrics to “Wishful Thinking” — a song about driving through, with, and because of uncertainty. This “not knowing” is meant to encompass our inability (or unwillingness) to see the future consequences of our actions, the tensions within our own identities, and the instability of our built and natural environments. Central to this theme of uncertainty are the implied risks associated with complacency.

The full score to “Wishful Thinking” is provided in the appendix, and readers may choose to experience the lyrics, rhythmic patterns, and — if they are able — tonality in full before or after reading the chapter. You may also choose not to look at the score, opting instead to view the chapter like a spider’s web — the lyrics weave in, around, and between, framing the view beyond: subtle, yet strong. Unlike the other compositions included in this thesis, “Wishful Thinking” was written long before I began researching, in the days when I used going for a drive in place of therapy. Despite this, the song is still critical, or perhaps skeptical, of how at the end of the drive I always ended at the same destination, physically and psychologically. Each moment between lyrics takes that natural skepticism and answers it with informed experiences, this time critical because of the research that brought the environmental and historical conflicts and consequences to my attention.

The scenes, snapshots, and reflections between lyrics are varied, but all focus on reflections of my own experiences on the road. There are a few themes that I deliberately sought to highlight and critique, the first of which is inevitability. As a culture, we do more than just take our systems of transportation for granted — we assume that cars, driving, and roads will be the most central, most day-to-day method. We assume the inevitability of car crashes or fender benders, animal casualties, traffic, road rage, and other experiences and reactions. This is problematic because it keeps us from noticing how constructed our environment and culture has become, and how roads and driving have come to symbolize power, autonomy, and access. Worse, from an advocate's position, is how it not only discourages, but prevents people from asking questions about how the system might be improved, or even replaced.

A second theme is that of interpersonal interaction. Obviously, there are interpersonal dynamics between occupants of the same vehicle. There is also interaction between drivers and passengers of other vehicles, usually limited to facial expressions and hand gestures, but these can sometimes generate powerful responses. And last, there is interaction between drivers and pedestrians — small interactions that usually serve a regulatory purpose. Because the average American spends approximately 45 minutes driving each day (Hall, 2015), the car becomes the setting of many interpersonal exchanges (Noy, 2009). Some of these are mundane, though not insignificant, and involve routine exchanges of information or feelings. Others stand out as “turning points,” such as when my mother gave me the “birds and the bees” talk on the way home from the eye doctor. The norms of riding in the car diminish the need for eye contact,

which can be freeing when talking about difficult subjects, but that freedom is limited because passengers cannot exit a moving vehicle without risking serious injury.

A third theme is interaction with the natural and built environment. Roads cause a lasting, if not permanent, effect on surrounding ecology. More than this, in many locations they go against the local ecology and topography, slicing through mountains, bridging bodies of water, and cutting off ecosystems to often devastating effects. While this is easiest to spot on the massive, flat, and straight interstate highways, they are not the worst culprits. The roads that concern me the most are those that masquerade as natural. National Park Roads do this purposefully, and dirt access roads do this unassumingly. A narrow, dirt and gravel road into the Appalachians may seem to follow the natural contour of the mountains and take on the appearance of being beyond time or human influence, but the truth is that even if a rough path existed before, someone had to widen it, perhaps construct switchbacks to control the grade, lay the gravel, check back every so often to fill in holes, etc. Even roads built along ancient indigenous trails that followed even more ancient animal trails cannot be considered natural. A road, by definition, is created, maintained, and used by humans for human purposes. When we accept that all roads are unnatural aspects of a built environment, we accept the locus of control for how the built environment and natural environments interact.

In order to make the reading experience more organized, the guiding lyrics appear between asterisks in italics. In some instances, I have shifted the alignment of certain lyrics to reflect key shifts in the rhythm or tonality of the music.

\*\*\*

*You're waiting for something you don't understand; you're tracing the future on the back of your hand; you're asking the questions to the answers you have while searching for someone to show you the way...*

*...but you don't want to know what you'll find, and you don't really mind not knowing.*

\*\*\*

I drive because I can

I drive because I can access places where my feet alone can't take me

I drive because I can exercise my freedom to take wrong turns

I drive because I can control my destiny by choosing my destination

I drive because I can leave behind my problems, or collide with them head-on

I drive because I love to

I drive because I love to turn the music up, roll the windows down, and let go

I drive because I love to see the mountains roll past my windows

I drive because I love to be alone with my thoughts and my dreams

I drive because I love to be distracted from my thoughts and my dreams

I drive because I must

I drive because I must go to work

I drive because I must live out the duration of my lease, 30 miles from my work

I drive because I must buy kitty litter, and that's too heavy for my bike basket

I drive because I must be on time and walking provides too many opportunities to stop  
and smell the honeysuckle

I drive in spite

I drive in spite of the cost of gas and the knowledge of how environmentally irresponsible  
the oil industry is

I drive in spite of the dozens of dead deer, squirrels, cats, bears, turtles, birds, and other  
animals whose entrails stain the road red

I drive in spite of the reality that my choice to drive contributes to the congestion and  
pollution of my home

I drive in spite of my hatred of driving.

\*\*\*

*Four wheels and an engine don't make a home, and a map of the highways is not where  
you're from...*

\*\*\*

### **The Disenchanted Driver: The Seven Stages of Your (not so convenient) Commute**

The following seven stages are not meant to box drivers in; after all they box and buckle themselves into confined spaces on a daily basis. Rather, these stages are responses to commuting that many people have, and seeing as how the drivers you are stuck in traffic with are likely having a similar experience, it is reasonable to conclude that the driver next to you is likely experiencing one or more of these stages at any given time. While we like to think of ourselves as individuals, there are only so many



differences between drivers sitting at the same mile-marker of the same highway at the same time.

The seven stages, dismissal, rose-colored windshield, realization, detachment, rude awakening, road rage, and grudging acceptance, are a part of the framework that makes up our learning to live with the commute to which we are committed. They are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling, but they are not emotional stops on some linear highway like the one you are physically stopped on. Not everyone goes through all of these stages or in a prescribed order. Our hope is that with these stages comes the knowledge that your feelings about your commute are normal, making you better equipped to cope with the idiots and assholes with whom you are required to share the road. Just remember, your commute is just as bad as everyone else's.

### **Stage One: Dismissal**

In this stage you dismiss the physical, mental, emotional, and material costs associated with your commute, and instead recognize the importance of the job to which you are traveling. This stage is marked by thoughts such as, "This job is such a great stepping stone in my career!" or "I am so lucky to have found a great position in such an up and coming company only 45 minutes away!" This dismissal stage is important because it keeps you from giving your notice the instant you first hit traffic, or from rashly using up your entire savings to put down a deposit on an apartment closer to your job that you can't actually afford.

### **Stage Two: Rose-Colored Windshield**

Before entering this stage, you begin to question the feasibility of making your commute everyday. In order to cope with these questions and doubts regarding the

physical, mental, emotional, and material costs of your commute, you enter the rose-colored windshield stage. In this stage, you find yourself admiring all aspects of the commute, such as the mellifluous voice of the radio personality, the comfort of your leather seats, the beauty of the passing landscape, or the wittiness of other cars' license plates. This stage is marked by thoughts such as, "The way the sun gleams off that chrome fender is just dazzling!" or "Driving on this newly-paved road is like gliding across black velvet!" The rose-colored windshield stage is important because it allows you to enjoy your commute during the most difficult time of the transition into your new job, when you are still new, but not new enough to play the "new person" card.

### **Stage Three: Realization**

In this stage, you begin to notice those aspects of the drive you had previously ignored, such as how your back starts to ache after the first 15 minutes, the way no one knows how to successfully use a turn-signal or merge lane, or how every stop light seems to turn red just as you reach it. Those aspects you previously admired also begin to grate on you as the "dazzling gleam" on chrome fenders hurts your eyes, and the way the radio personality laughs at his own jokes makes you want to reach through the speakers and strangle him. This stage is marked by thoughts such as, "Seriously, another license plate pun?!" or "Oh good grief, this song again?!" or "Oh great, another traffic jam because no one can merge onto the highway!" This stage is important because it brings you into touch with reality, and forces you to confront the more difficult aspects of your commute.

### **Stage Four: Detachment**

In this stage, you endeavor to make your commute more bearable by distracting yourself with playlists, podcasts, audio books, or phone calls. You invest in expensive

luxury items like Bluetooth hands free devices, surround-sound speaker systems, memory foam neck and back pillows, and various apps to provide greater comfort and entertainment. This stage is marked by thoughts such as, “I had no idea how interesting NPR podcasts are!” or “I can’t wait to find out what happens with this love triangle on my drive home!” The detachment stage is important because it allows you to indulge in your commute, giving you valuable mental-health and fun time before and after a draining day in the office.

### **Stage Five: Rude Awakening**

This stage is often entered after a speeding ticket, traffic citation, or fender bender occurs due to overly successful mental escape achieved in the detachment stage. In this stage, you are simultaneously thankful to be alive and wary of driving. You are instantly reminded of all the warnings issued to you in your driver’s education classes, and you are flooded with mental images of mangled, burning, or otherwise totaled cars surrounded by ambulances, police cars, and fire trucks. You vow to pay better attention and to closely follow all traffic rules and guidelines, even when you know you don’t really need to take that turn at 35 mph, but since the sign suggests it you will. This stage is marked by thoughts such as, “The first fifteen minutes of rain are when the road is the slickest and most dangerous!” and “Always count to three and look both ways before leaving a stop sign!” This stage is important because it makes you a better driver, though neck and wrist tension may increase greatly during this stage.

### **Stage Six: Road Rage**

After a somewhat significant period of driving without incident, the realizations you had previously escaped through detachment come back with a vengeance, and your

frustration, annoyance, or nerves transform into a hot rage. In this stage you are acutely aware of the idiotic antics of your fellow drivers. Every minor infraction sends you into a boiling fury, and you often chastise other drivers for their stupidity and lack of regard for your safety and need to arrive at work on time as if they could hear you. This stage is marked by thoughts (and shouts) such as, “Get out of my fucking way, you stupid asshole!” and “Come on granny, the speed limit is 70!!” The road rage stage is important because it allows you to expel much of the frustration that you buried in past stages.

### **Stage Seven: Grudging Acceptance**

In this, the final stage, you accept that your commute, with all of its aggravating traffic, boring podcasts, and discomforts, is part of your necessary, daily routine. This does not mean, however, that you are able to truly enjoy it, only that you have learned to live with it because you are now so entrenched in your job that you are determined to stay, earning promotions, extra leave time, and other benefits, until you are eligible for retirement. This stage is marked by thoughts such as, “My commute does not define me,” or “If only they realized it’s just not worth it to cut people off.” Individuals generally spend a long time in this stage, but understand that various accidents or other occurrences can lead a person to relapse to earlier stages.

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*...You stick to the back roads to feel less alone, while the miles are marking your march against time...*

\*\*\*

I wanted to go for a drive, and I thought I’d just follow route 33 until it reached the mountains and then find a safe place to pull off and write. But as always, I passed a

road and turned on impulse, unable to resist the lure of the road not taken. I made a right, and then a left, then another right. At this point my sense of direction was a bit turned around, so I pulled into a church parking lot deciding it was as good a place as any to stop. I was pulling in to park at the top of the hill when I saw it.

It was little more than a vehicle-sized dirt trail leading into the woods. A small brown sign read “FDR 72 Public Right-of-Way to the George Washington National Forest. Stay on Road.” The lush green foliage seemed to lean over the red dirt as if keeping a secret. I remembered the words of Robert Frost as I looked to where it bent in the undergrowth, and decided to take the road less traveled by.

I eased onto the dirt and gravel, dodging two massive potholes only a few feet from the start of the road. The “road” dipped over rocky brush and then slowly started to rise. I use the term “road” loosely because it barely met the modern American standards of what a road is. Jagged bits of mountain rocks jutted up from the dirt, and deep holes and trenches showed where water flowed and collected during storms or snowmelt, washing away the gravel that had once been purposefully placed there. Trees and plants encroached at the edges and pushed stubbornly on either side of the tire tracks left by previous drivers. Those tire tracks gave some reassurance that I was, in fact, on a road, but I had been growing more and more wary as I crawled up the mountain. I pulled off and considered turning around before the “road” dissolved into wilderness. The only thing worse than driving this “road” was the thought of having to turn around and drive it all again. Just then, another truck passed going the opposite direction. Rationalizing that they had to be coming from somewhere, I decided to forge on and find out where the road went.

Every jolt and jostle made me more determined to finish the road. I couldn't turn around, no matter how bad it got. And it got bad. The higher up the mountain the narrower the road and the steeper the drop-offs. At times the path was less of a road and more of a precarious scramble over flatly-cleaved rocks that resembled the ripples the tide leaves on sand, but deeper, sharper, and harder. My maximum speed up the mountain was 15 mph, but most times I could only go 5 mph as I inched my way between ditches. The flowers, trees, and overlooks at the power line rights-of-way were beautiful in my peripheral vision, but every time I looked away from the few feet of road right in front of me, I dipped into another pothole, bouncing and wincing at the impact.

I drove up and around the mountain for 6 miles, all the while wondering how automobile travel had been possible before paved roads became the norm. It was treacherous, and I had the benefit of pneumatic tires, shocks, a modern (albeit manual) transmission, and power steering. How on earth had anyone traveled those early roads and lived to tell the tale?

As it turns out, my worst fear was true — the road led to an ATV trail system that went off into dense wood, giving brief glimpses of muddy ditches and rocky hills. One section seemed to still be wide and flat enough for car travel, but my resolve had vanished. The “road” likely went on for miles, deteriorating in quality, width, and passability, all the while climbing the mountains into West Virginia.

I turned around.

The only comfort going back down was that I knew for sure that I'd be back on smooth, black asphalt in six miles. This was little consolation, though, because six miles

at roughly 10 mph down a forest service road feels like eternity. My reckless curiosity evaporated and rained back into my consciousness as anxiety over my recklessness.

What if my tire blew? I have AAA, but would anyone be able to even find me here, let alone be willing to come rescue me? What if it started to rain and the road turned to mud, leaving me stuck, or worse, sliding down the mountainside? What if another vehicle with bigger tires and better shocks came speeding around a turn and we collided head-on, and then I slid down the mountainside?

I could feel my muscles — tense, wound tight, clenched, stiff. I walked myself through the process of relaxing them. I loosened my jaw, relaxed my grip on the wheel, let my shoulders fall, and felt my breath come in slow and even. I realized, then, that I had been fighting the road. Clutching the wheel tight, I had tried to forge a straight and smooth path down a windy and bumpy one. I was exhausted, and around mile 7, I gave up.

What I found was that once I stopped fighting it, the road drove my truck for me. I coasted in second gear, letting the wheel slide under my hands, shifting back and forth as the tires found the path of least resistance. Without so much tension, my body moved in unison with the truck, following the choreography of the landscape. Hips, torso, shoulders, neck, and wrists rocked, bent, bounced, and swayed in tempo with the gravelly rhythm.

With my thoughts free to roam, I noticed the beauty around me. It's amazing how much different it is to drive 15 miles an hour instead of 50. Butterflies drifted in front of me and I stopped to let them pass — no wind currents catching their fragile frames and forcing them to collide with my fender. When I stop beneath the power lines to admire

the view, I hear them buzz and hum in the humid summer air. I drive behind a hawk and I can make out the details of her feathers as she glides effortlessly to land on a branch.

When I reach the end of the road, I am reluctant to trade rock and dirt for pavement. The symbiosis I achieved with this mountain road can't be found on a paved one where the natural rhythm is buried under toneless aggregate. It's like the difference between listening to a solo cellist or a whole symphony orchestra. The solo cellist is nice, soothing, pleasant, and perhaps even evocative, but he can never achieve the diversity, brilliance, colors, moods, and possibilities of a full orchestra. Or if the paved road is Mozart, with all his authentic cadences and tonal harmonies, then the unpaved mountain road is Stravinsky — at times difficult to hear, to comprehend, to appreciate. But in those vastly complicated lines, amid dissonance and chaos, is natural beauty. Beauty you can only appreciate if you give in and become a part of it.

I doubt I'll travel Forest Development Road 72 again, but I'll always be glad I took a chance on the road less traveled.

\*\*\*

*...but you don't want to know what you'll find, and you don't really mind  
not knowing...*

*...where it all goes, where this road will take you, with nothing to show but a busted  
odometer...*

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### **A Midmorning Fender Bender**

Well it seems I'm always running late, no matter how early I try to go, but,  
Now it seems my luck is turning bad (assuming I had good luck to start with).



I'm driving way too fast, I feel out of control.

The clock is relentless to such a worrying soul.

Well I guess, I guess I should've known better than to go rushing in blind, but,

I don't always do like I'm told. Life's too short to fall in line.

I'm driving way too fast, I'm riding on borrowed time.

The clock is relentless to a soul like mine.

I should have seen it coming on, but I rode right into that collision.

I felt the guilt before I knew what went wrong. I didn't see you come along

Well I guess I got what I deserved, busted but not broken inside.

It's enough to make me come unnerved. Life's too short to spend paying fines.

I'm driving way too fast, I feel out of control.

The clock is relentless to such a worrying soul.

I'm driving way too fast, I'm riding on borrowed time.

The clock is relentless to a soul like mine

\*\*\*

*...You've lost count of the years since you first fell in love with the solitude and promises you store in your suitcase. You don't run from problems you pack them up with you, to keep them from hurting anyone else...*

\*\*\*

## **A Love Story in Five Acts**

### **Act 1: Exposition**

The back roads of northern Michigan. There are five of us crammed in the Jeep Grand Cherokee, and Michael and I are next to each other in the back seat. It is July, the windows are open, and the warm night air smells like rain. In the shadows, our hands are clasped between us. His thumb gently strokes my knuckles, dipping up and down along the ridges. This is summer love at its finest — no one knows that we are dating, taking long walks in the moonlight, spending sweltering nights together in secret.

“I think I’m falling for you,” he whispers in my ear, so low I feel the wisp of air from his words more than hear the actual syllables.

At this moment, the road rises and falls — a butterfly hill, as I have always called them, because of the way they make my stomach jump. But as the butterflies rise in my stomach, I know it is not because of the road. It is the stirrings of first love.

### **Act 2: Rising Action**

I-94 East, on the way from Minneapolis to Eau Claire. It is July again, one year after our summer together. Michael’s four-door Saturn sedan has no radio or air conditioning, so we shout conversation over the rush of wind. Our hands are clasped on

the middle console — we are unable to let go after being apart for ten months even though our fingers are slick in the summer heat.

Michael points out a billboard along the highway: *Smile, your mother was pro-life.*

“I always look forward to that billboard.” He begins with a smile, “I said that to my mom one time and she just looked at me and said ‘you don’t know that.’” He laughs at the absurdity of the billboard, and the honesty of his mother’s response.

This sight launches a conversation about the different political climates between Minnesota and Wisconsin, and I listen over the roar of the interstate, searching for clues that will teach me more about the man I travelled 1,000 miles to see. I find similarities in our opinions, and differences in the customs and terrain, like when he pumps his gas and then pays, when in Virginia you have to pay before, or the way the sloping hills of the landscape lack the drama of the Appalachian mountains I love. But none of this matters because as we speed down I-94, I feel as if I have already arrived — that I have found home.

### **Scene 3: Climax**

I-66 West to I-81 South, on the way from Woodbridge to Harrisonburg. It is one of those clear, January days when every color in the Valley seems to be in high resolution. We’re finally together in the Shenandoah Valley, my favorite place, on my favorite highway, in my beloved Ford Ranger pickup truck. My hands rest gently on the wheel, and his lay idle in his lap. I sing along softly to the playlist he made me over the summer, and try to make conversation. After two days together we are running out of

new topics, and too many of the old ones lead to arguments. When we are apart, we can ignore it, but in the car I resort to what seems like a safe topic: the drive itself.

“This is my favorite view. They didn’t used to have a guard rail here, so it used to look like you could just drive right into the horizon.”

“That sounds awful.”

“I liked it,” I say, trying not to be disappointed in how easily he dismissed one of my favorite parts of the drive. “Isn’t the view beautiful, at least?” I add, making another effort to impart my love of the land on him.

“It’s alright. I can’t really see myself living here.”

When we drive past another one of my favorite views off the highway, a white church steeple against the Blue Ridge, I glance over and notice his eyes are shut. I switch off the playlist he made, full of pop songs and strange metal, and listen to a bluegrass playlist of my own. The music is better suited to the Valley, to my truck, and to me. Breathing in the re-circulated air, I sense the tension strongly and know that this drive has spoiled everything.

#### **Scene 4: Falling Action**

U.S. 33 West, on the way from Martin’s grocery store to my apartment in downtown Harrisonburg. At the store we had relaxed, but back in the small cab of my truck the tension returns and there is no escaping it. We breathe it alongside the smell of onion and cheese emanating from the grocery bags behind our seats, and it is too much.

“What’s wrong,” I ask, slightly pleading, and keeping my eyes ahead.

“Nothing’s wrong.”

“Be honest. This trip hasn’t been very good. Something is wrong.”

And finally, in the fading evening light, at once trapped by the steel, plastic, and glass keeping us contained and suspended over the pavement and freed by the lack of eye contact, he tells the truth.

“I’m not happy. I haven’t been happy for a while.”

“Ok.” The light turns red and I shift from fourth to first gear, letting the sudden hum of the engine fill the silence. “...how long have you felt this way?”

“I don’t know. Since November? And then the comments you made yesterday about Kate ...”

“I just think it’s weird that you would defend your ex-girlfriend instead of your current girlfriend.” I throw the truck into gear a bit more forcefully than necessary, and the tires screech slightly on the pavement. It’s a short drive home, and when I pull into the parking garage we’ve only scratched the surface of our problems, but I know that now there is no turning back.

### **Scene 5: Denouement**

I-81 North to I-66 East, from Harrisonburg to Dulles International Airport. I offered to drive him to the airport because I didn’t want to be alone in my apartment on the first night after breaking up, and the airport is the same direction as my mom’s house. I had cried earlier in my apartment, but in the comfort of my truck, my eyes are dry and focused on the road I know so well. I am not so much calm as I am clear: clear that this is my last chance to respond to the terrible things he said about me while we fought, clear that breaking up is the right decision, and clear that the next two hours will likely be the last time I ever see Michael.

I resolve to make the ride memorable, but I decide to use this last opportunity as a chance to defend myself. I hadn't responded earlier, when he called me selfish, manipulative, and condescending, but now that I had recovered from the shock, I was hurt. I decided that my mission would be to make this drive the most awkward and miserable of his life.

At first I talk nonchalantly, striving for a detached coldness, unconsciously falling back upon the principle of least interest. I exhaust all the possible conversations quickly, though, and opt to play music instead. The playlist is called Band-Aid Songs, and it had been made specifically with heartache in mind. Track after track, smooth male voices tell me I'm beautiful, I'm their only love, no one in the world is like me.

*You don't have to change, a thing about you babe, I'm telling you from where I sit  
you're one of a kind. Relationships, I don't know why, they never work out, they'll  
make you cry, but the guy that says goodbye to you is out of his mind.*

I sing along to it all, but this one I sing the loudest, turning the volume knob to be sure it is audible over the noise of the road. It makes me bold.

"Where does this drive rank in your most awkward life experiences?" I am playful, teasing, and thoroughly pleased with myself.

"Probably second."

"Oh."

I'm disappointed, and I feel the anger leave a hole in my gut that quickly fills with fear. Every mile brings us closer to the end of our relationship, to the end of the dreams we shared, to the end of the life I thought we'd make together. I suddenly feel that we are

suspended — the world is speeding past but in the cab of my truck, we are stationary. We are at once together and apart.

I slow to the speed limit, and then slightly under the speed limit, to prolong the inevitable. I *accidentally* make a wrong turn at the airport so that I can hear his voice again, even if it is just to tell me I missed the turn. At last I pull into the departures lane and take the truck out of gear. Without looking at me or saying a word, Michael steps out of the truck, grabs his bag from behind the seat, and shuts the door behind him.

\*\*\*

*...Because they don't want to know what you'll find, and you don't really mind not knowing where it all goes, where this road will take you...*

\*\*\*

Forgive me, Gaia.

I took a life today. At least, I think I did. It was a hit and run, you see. I hit, but I had to run to work. I did try to find him. I had seen him limping away into the bushes, and I knew he had to be injured. And the awful thuds under my feet, between hard metal and pavement... I knew he had been injured badly. Perhaps, lethally.

I tried to stop, but my brakes need servicing and I couldn't stop in time. For a split second, Gaia, I saw his eyes, I knew his fear and his pain, greater than my own, even now as he likely lays dying in the tall grass beside the cow pasture. Comfort him, and make him one with you.

I will not ask why me, but rather, why him? I will not say he should not have been in the road, but that I should not have gone so fast. I will not justify by pointing to overpopulation, the insignificance of species, or survival of the fittest, because every life

is precious. I will never excuse myself and I will not regret — to regret is to feel sorry for myself, for the pain my action caused me. But I don't deserve pity, self-directed or otherwise.

Instead, I will never forget. I will not forget the fear in his eyes, the panic of his whole body as he sprang into action, seeking safety on the other side of the road. I will never forget how I spotted him — tail held high and swaying jauntily — but how I chose my own interests of timeliness and speed over care and safety. I will never forget the rustling of grass as he slunk away from me, even as I belatedly tried to offer help. I will never forget that I took the life of an innocent, and drove away.

I wept for him, for what that is worth. Not for myself in self-pity, but for him. For his soft, small body, so fragile and battered. For his strength, his confidence, his pluck, now crushed. For the way he had walked, back straight, tail waving like a banner proudly above him. For the life he might have led, and the lives that might feel the loss of him.

But if there were no others, Mother, know that I will mourn him. That I felt his presence, felt his soul, and felt the pain of it all. Know that I will always see his face reflected in my own cat's faces, and I will always be reminded. Know that I will do all in my power not to take a life again without any purpose of survival, or protection, or mercy.

Forgive me, Gaia, for my carelessness toward you and the lives that give you life.

\*\*\*

*...with nothing to show but a busted odometer....*

*...and a tank full of wishful thinking...*



\*\*\*

I died today.

It was pretty unexpected, but then I guess dying is like that most times. I wasn't sick — I was in the peak of health, at the top of my game, and I was having a great morning.

It's strange, that the last moments of my life were so ordinary. I always hoped I'd go fighting a bear or coyote or something extreme. Then they'd remember me as that crazy guy who died fighting, and he saved all of the Johnson's cows! But I didn't die fighting. I died running, like the scaredy cat I guess I am.

I was walking my regular route, from the woods at the end of the pasture to the Johnson's barn. They usually put food out, so I go every morning and ingratiate myself because it's tuna, and a guy can only eat so many birds and mice. But I never stay longer than it takes to eat and show off a little, since I don't want to end up like their other cats, stuck in the barn or even worse, the house.

I usually weave through the tall grasses, enjoying the smells, chasing a bird or chipmunk here and there, but today I was on the Black Trail. I've seen the shiny beasts that run like lightning down the Black Trail, and I usually stay away. Today though, I walked the edge to avoid the squelchy mud and wet grass. I had managed to shelter in the hollow of a tree through the storms the night before. I was dry, and I wanted to stay that way, so I walked down the short stretch of the conveniently dry Trail, tail held high.

I was hungry, and the hunger made me careless. The screeching caught my attention first. Then there was an awful burnt smell that rose off the hard surface of the Trail. Turning in panic, I saw the shiny beast careening toward me, larger and faster than

seemingly possible. Overcome with terror, I froze for a moment, mesmerized by it's glowing eyes, and then I ran. I darted as fast as I could for safety, but before I knew what had happened, I was under the beast. It rolled me several times across the rough surface, its shell delivering hammering blows to head, torso, and paws. And then its massive feet ground mine into dust — a final, lethal attack before the beast sped on.

I dragged myself into the tall grass, the pain greater than any I had ever known. A two legger was approaching — I could hear the uneven, clumsy gait and rustle of grass. I burrowed further, nothing but survival on my mind. I licked at paws and tail, but I could not reach the wounds beneath now-matted fur and bruised skin. The pain was making me dizzy, and it was hard to move. I thought I could taste blood in my closed mouth.

In the very last moments, I smelled the sweet smell of grass and the pungent scent of manure. I heard the low, lazy voices of cows in the pasture, and my very last thought was of tuna fish.

\*\*\*

*You've covered your bases, you've found all the loopholes, you're watching for signs of  
whatever comes next...*

\*\*\*

### **On the Occasion of Your First Accident**

You always said that you were better than me, not capable of doing wrong.

You were the model I should strive to be, but now that's changed so I wrote this song.

I used to warn you not to follow right on the tail of the throng.

You wouldn't listen to a screw up though, but now I'll make you listen to this song.

Because this is where I get to say what I've been waiting to for so long...

I told you so! I told you it could happen to you.

The perfect girl, the perfect driver, but now your car doesn't look like new.

You didn't listen to me, but if you had, you'd know I told you so.

And I'm so glad that you weren't hurt, that it wasn't worse,

But I don't feel bad that now you're finally just like me

I told you so! I told you it could happen to you.

You didn't listen to me, but if you had, you'd know I told you.

I said it once, I said it twice, but you just scoffed and brushed me off.

Here's some humble pie served by the slice, you should've known your luck would wear off.

I told you so! I told you it could happen to you

The perfect girl, the perfect driver, but now your car doesn't look like new.

You didn't listen to me, but now you know, I told you so.

\*\*\*

*...Because we don't want to know what we'll find, and we don't really mind*

*not knowing...*

\*\*\*

Each of the preceding scenes was based on my own experiences driving; most are from within the past year, but some extend back several years. Several were written while driving, such as “A Midmorning Fender Bender” which I composed while driving home from work the day of the accident, inventing lines and then singing them back to myself over and over so I would remember it long enough to get home and scribble it down. Others were written immediately after driving, such as the dual piece *Forgive me, Gaia/I died today*, which I wrote as a desperate attempt to find meaning and forgiveness, and more importantly to stop crying, before my boss arrived at work.

Still others were written years after, such as *A Love Story in Five Acts*. When I began this project, I made a catalogue of important moments I experienced on the road, and in doing so I realized that I could tell the entire story of my only lasting relationship by using scenes on the road. This seemed not only personally important, but culturally important. As I have shared this story, I have gotten responses from others who also experienced moments of coming together or apart while on the road.

Though many of these pieces were written as my own way of coping with the problematic, and sometimes traumatic, aspects of the road, they do serve a purpose beyond personal exploration. These scenes try to make the feelings many of us experience while driving more accessible — whether it is the feeling of road rage, or being swept up in the magic of the open road, or simply enjoying the convenience the road affords, these feelings, along with the values that explain them, are a huge component of the endurance of our car culture. By using art, I have invited others to experience, to live through my body, and maybe in turn, to listen to their own critical observations.

## CHAPTER 5

*Words for roads:* Road, Side road, Secondary road, Service road, Toll road, Back road, Frontage Road, Access road, Roadway, Motorway, Freeway, Pathway, Parkway, Byway, Beltway, Thruway, Causeway, Driveway, Expressway, Highway, Divided highway, Super highway, Lane, Suicide lane, Express lane, Hot lane, HOV lane, Clover, Loop, Circle, Switchback, Court, Cul de sac, Street, Main street, Side street, Backstreet, Boulevard, Thoroughfare, Avenue, Mews, Route, Interstate, Turnpike, Trail, Entrance, Exit, Off ramp, On ramp, Escape ramp, Overpass, Pass, Cross, Dead end, Drag, Main drag, Drive, Alley, Pike, Path, Detour, Blacktop.

*Words for the absence of roads:* Wilderness, Roadless, Off-the-map

\*\*\*

Within communication, we have long acknowledged the importance of language and naming (Cox, 2013; Kay & Kempton, 1984). Language carries denotative and connotative meanings, it reflects and effects how we are able to understand objects and concepts, and most importantly, it reveals our cultural priorities. Our language about roads shows how culturally significant they are, to the point that we have few terms that allow us to describe or comprehend areas without them. Our use of road metaphors to understand other concepts, such as intersectionality, constrains our thinking in the same way that the actual immobile structures limit our potential for mobility (Woods, 2012). This illustrates how our car-centeredness is truly a *car culture* (Sheller, 2004; Urry, 2004) that shapes and constrains so much of our daily lives and decisions.

With this thesis, I have attempted to capture, challenge, and question the role of roads in our everyday lives, as well as the exceptional circumstances and tensions that

surround roads and driving as a unique setting and scene. In an age when sustainability and environmentalism are the new buzzwords (Allen, 2016; Cox, 2013), we need to understand the century of cultural, political, and environmental factors that have led to the development of a road-centered society as well as question whether the path we currently are following will allow us to sustain the mobility, freedom, and access we currently associate with the open road. In this chapter I will provide a brief summary of the previous four chapters, review the goals of inquiry, and reflect upon the potential contributions of this thesis to the fields of communication, nature, and culture.

In chapter one, I established the goals of this thesis — advocacy, the use of music as method, and the connection of rhythmanalysis to mobilities and autoethnography — and gave a brief history of our changing orientation to roads over the last 100 years. This orientation shifted from a belief that roads were always an improvement to the landscape, to the perspective that some landscapes are worth protecting from roads (Lewis, 2013; Louter, 2009). This reflected changing attitudes toward nature, from one limited to utilization to one that values wilderness, where wilderness is space that is free from human involvement (Garrard, 2012). In the first chapter I also establish my own position within the car culture, keeping with the self-reflexive traditions of autoethnography which I endeavor to fulfill throughout the study.

In chapter two, I elaborate on the three research areas that have influenced my exploration — mobilities, autoethnography, and rhythmanalysis. Mobilities and autoethnography are not usually paired together, likely due to the external focus of mobilities and the internal focus of autoethnography (Adams et al., 2015; Sheller & Urry, 2004). To reconcile this, I provide rhythmanalysis as a sort of linking perspective that

puts primacy on the researcher's body as the first point of understanding, but is ultimately interested in using the body as a reference point for understanding external rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004). I provide examples from the literature where scholars have implicitly drawn on this constellation without explicitly naming it "mobilities," "autoethnography," and "rhythmanalysis," and end the chapter with a discussion of *present* and *presence* which play an important role in chapter three.

Chapter three puts this constellation into practice and seeks to analyze the rhythms of the Blue Ridge Parkway through applied rhetorical criticism, autoethnography, and song. I begin by taking a critical look at the history, design, and construction of the BRP, giving examples of ways the National Park Service has drawn upon the dominant folk myth of Appalachia to create an experience that is wholly constructed. I then provide a narrative about my own experience driving the Parkway, including my interaction with exhibits I mention during my discussion of its history. The song "Parkway," follows the narrative, blending my critical and artistic voices in order to evoke the effect of the BRP. In the discussion I suggest that the Parkway's ability to conceal its critical past by enabling moments of *presence* are part of the magic that has kept it so popular over the years.

In chapter four, I contrast the magic of the Parkway with glimpses into the everyday reality of the road, as seen from my own windshield. I abandon the "scholarly" voice entirely, and present my own experiences with an open and honest heart. I embrace the struggle between staying critical of the road system and being drawn into its charms, and use art to make consonance out of dissonance. In doing so, I touch on themes of uncertainty, inevitability, interpersonal interaction, and interaction with the natural and

built environment as I seek to capture and evoke the feelings of powerlessness, heartbreak, schadenfreude, frustration, and regret. In the following section, I will review the goals of inquiry and highlight key moments throughout the thesis when I have advanced these goals.

### **Reviewing the Goals of Inquiry**

Throughout this thesis, I have sought to make progress toward three main goals. First, I have endeavored to make a connection within methodology by explicitly drawing on rhythmanalysis and autoethnography within the context of mobilities, as well as the use of music composition as a method of inquiry. Second, I have offered a critical reading of the road in a romanticized setting as in chapter three, and in everyday settings as in chapter four. Third, I have attempted to evoke feelings in order to allow them to consider how the road is so much more than infrastructure — it shapes and constrains our lives in various meaningful, but often unnoticed, ways.

In order to make a connection between theory and methodology, I drew explicitly from the literatures on autoethnography, mobilities, and rhythmanalysis. In chapter two I explained why these three literatures were an effective combination and gave examples of scholars who have done work in a similar way without explicitly calling it autoethnography, mobilities, or rhythmanalysis (Bennett, 2015; Noy, 2009). Chapter three put this methodological suggestion into practice by examining the Blue Ridge Parkway through a mobile, rhythmanalytical lens. In order to best represent the rhythms of the BRP, I used an autoethnographic narrative of my own experience traveling it.

In addition to advancing the explicit crystallization of mobilities, autoethnographic, and rhythmanalytical approaches, in chapters three and four I



demonstrate how music composition, or specifically songwriting, can be used as a method of inquiry in the same sense as Richardson (2000) advances the idea of writing as a method of inquiry. In chapter three, the song “Parkway” represents how my own experience was later colored by my research about the history, construction, and maintenance of the BRP. In chapter four, the song “Wishful Thinking” is used to represent a skeptical, albeit romantic, interpretation of the road where the theme of uncertainty is used to connect a series of narrative snapshots of my own experiences and observations. Two of those narratives, “A Midmorning Fender Bender,” and “On the Occasion of Your First Accident,” use music and lyrics to address issues of safety and inevitability on the road. Both songs are about car accidents, but “A Midmorning Fender Bender” is a reflection on my own car accident, and “On the Occasion of Your First Accident” is a rather smug assessment of a family member’s.

The songs in chapter four, and the narratives that are presented along side them, are ultimately concerned with the everyday experience on the road. This quotidian focus is an important tenet of rhythm analysis (Lefebvre, 2004; Edensor, 2011), and by using an artistic and evocative method of representing these mundane experiences, I have attempted to bring focus to some of the cultural themes and practices we deem “normal.” Since some of the everyday experiences we have, such as sitting in traffic, are negative, I contrast them with the Blue Ridge Parkway driving experience as way of showing how our dependence on roads and car travel goes deeper than mere necessity — it is driven by an underlying cultural romanticism, fueled by 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetic values, 20<sup>th</sup> century notions of pastoral, wilderness, and georgic, and a long cultural tradition of “open road,” narratives (Garrard, 2012; Least Heat-Moon, 2013; Noblitt, 1994). By using art as a

means of inquiry, reflection, and understanding, I not only call attention to this romanticism, but echo it and evoke it.

My choice to use autoethnography and music to represent everyday and extraordinary experiences on the road was guided by more than just a perceived theoretical “fit.” Using the one hundredth anniversary of the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916 and the National Park Service as well as the sixtieth anniversary of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 as a significant moment to take pause and reflect, I have sought to provide insight into a cultural system of mobility that is so often affirmed as necessary without any substantial justification. I have made my own reflections as informed, reflexive, and accessible as possible in order to begin a conversation about whether the American car culture is a healthy and sustainable model, or if it has precluded the sustainable development of other modes of mobility. In the next section, I offer some parting thoughts on American car culture today and in the future.

### **Planning the Next Road Trip**

As I near the end of the research and writing process, I am painfully aware of how much is missing. I have not explored the vast cultural artifacts romanticizing and immortalizing roads. I have focused on driving because it seems to be our primary interaction with roads, but I have not considered the recent shift back to making roads accessible, making them “good roads,” for bicycles as the original good roads movement sought to do (Karnes, 2009; Lewis, 2013). I have not considered how pedestrians use or even subvert the road environment by not driving, by cutting across the orderly pattern of mobility and tramping across medians and jaywalking (Topinka, 2012). I have not

discussed attempts to decommission roads and convert them into multi-use greenways such as the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway in Boston.

Maybe even more fascinating is the turn away from private automobile travel back to other forms of shared transport or non-automobile personal transport (Urry, 2004; Urry, 2007). Within the younger, urban population there is some movement away from car ownership so that bicycling, walking, and taking public transit are no longer a last resort, but a conscious choice. This choice is significant because it is a small disruption within the car system — those who can afford to own a car and have the knowledge and means to operate and maintain a car but choose not too means that alternate means of transportation are no longer a last resort but a superior option.

A 2011 report found that 18 percent of Americans cut down on driving by taking public transportation, car pooling, or using other modes of transportation, doubling the percentage of Americans to cut down on driving in 1990 (GfK Roper Green Gauge, 2011). More recently, ride sharing services such as Uber and Lyft have replaced taxis, limos, and shuttles as the most popular mode of travel in metropolitan areas (Bender, 2015). Regardless of the reason behind the choice, the rising number of individuals who use an alternate form of transportation to get to work and the array of new businesses built around the concept of ridesharing shows that the car system, while far from being threatened, may be shifting. Though the dominant mobility system is still decidedly car-centric, individualism and privacy are no longer as important as convenience.

Despite this evidence of positive change, the road to change is both physically and metaphorically difficult to traverse. This was especially evident during a recent snowstorm that dumped over two feet of snow over most of the state of Virginia. It was

not long before that snow was plowed off the roadways and deposited in six-foot mounds on the sidewalks. Of course, we must clear the snow because we are a desperately mobile society, but it is meaningful that we clear it in some places before others. It is meaningful that the city is responsible. It is meaningful that the city clears the roads, but residents are supposed to clear the sidewalks. Only, how can the residents possibly clear so much snow when even the city had to use loaders, backhoes, and other heavy machinery to do so? The short answer is that they do not clear it (though the abandoned shovels in various snow piles are evidence of valiant attempts). We still take for granted that automobility is the most important mode of travel, and that opening the roads and parking lots is all that is needed for a return to daily activity.

It is moments like these that have driven me to take up art as a means of sense-making, coping, and living. I have repeatedly put my heart on the page, laid bare my hypocritical thoughts, and evoked the wrenching in my gut that slams on an invisible brake pedal and cannot be swayed by the logic of progress. I have used the two languages of my soul — music and words — in the hopes that maybe one of them will be heard, and in the hearing become a sort of visceral knowledge that is not content in knowing, but is compelled to breathe life into a system choking on exhaust fumes.

This project has been intensely personal because the literature on roads, ecology, and automobility too often focus on persons, not the person — not me, not you. I implicate myself, not as a role model or martyr, but as a human doing the best she can within the only culture available to her. I write because it is the most natural way I know of coping with the terrifying risks I face every time I get behind the wheel. Too often I have glimpsed my own mortality on the road. I face this involuntary vulnerability with

voluntary openness, with the hopes that in deconstructing the experience, assigning meaning to the moment, words to the feelings, I may reach some understanding of why it is worth it to turn the key in the ignition tomorrow, and the next day.

Looking back on the previous chapters, this project has been an exercise in orchestration. Orchestrating facts, aspects, characteristics, individual moments, thoughts, and feelings — the *present* — into a *presence* through a crystallization approach that is at once sensual, critical, and informed. The *present* is not enough to understand the stubborn persistence of automobility. It is only by listening to the rhythms, the interactions, that the present can be arranged, put in concert, and performed as *presence*. The *present* represents, but the orchestrated *presence* performs something else entirely — something that is best described here as the rhythm of a culture.

There is nothing more desolate than coming to the end of the road, especially in the face of a linear-minded society that demands constant forward motion. Yet, while this may be the metaphorical end of this particular road trip, it is hardly the end of the road as we know it. I have offered my own heart's reflection in an earnest attempt to invite the reflection of others. By inviting reflection, I hope to raise awareness and begin a conversation so that we can make the first steps toward revealing our car culture for what it is: a vastly complex human construction. Until we can recognize it as a construction, rather than the natural progression (and therefore only possibility) of human mobility, we cannot comprehend solutions to current problems of mobility that transcend the system of automobility.

## Appendix

Score

## Wishful Thinking

The musical score for 'Wishful Thinking' is written for voice and piano. It features a key signature of five flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat, D-flat, G-flat) and a time signature of 8/8. The score is divided into three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment consists of a right hand with chords and a left hand with a simple bass line. The vocal line includes lyrics and rests.

**System 1:** The vocal line begins with a rest for four measures, followed by a half note G4 and a quarter note F#4. The piano accompaniment starts with a chord of B-flat4, E-flat5, A-flat5, D-flat6, and G-flat6 in the right hand, and a bass line of B-flat4, E-flat5, A-flat5, D-flat6, and G-flat6 in the left hand.

**System 2:** The vocal line starts with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4, a quarter note E4, and a quarter note D4. The piano accompaniment continues with the same chord and bass line.

**System 3:** The vocal line starts with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note F#4, a quarter note E4, and a quarter note D4. The piano accompaniment continues with the same chord and bass line.

**Lyrics:**

You're  
wai - ting for some - thing you don't un - der - stand you're trac - ing the fu - ture on the palm  
— of your hand you're ask - ing the ques - tions to the ans - wers you have while

2

## Wishful Thinking

11

search-ing for some-one to show you the way but you don't

15

— want to know what you'll find and you don't real-ly mind —

20

— not know-ing Four wheels and an en-gine don't make a home and a

## Wishful Thinking

3

25

25 map of the high - ways is not where you're from you stick to the back roads to feel

28

28 less al-one while the miles are mark-ing your march a - gainst time

32

32 but you don't want to know what you'll find



4

## Wishful Thinking

36

and you don't real-ly mind not know-ing where it all goes

40

where this road will take

43

you with no-thing to show but a bus-ted o - do-me-ter

## Wishful Thinking

5

47



47 You've lost count of the years since you first fell in love with the

51



51 so-li-tude and pro-mi-ses you store in your suit-case you don't run from pro-blems you pack

54



54 them up with you to keep them from hur-ting a ny one else

6

## Wishful Thinking

58

58 'Cause they don't want to know what you'll find

62

62 and they don't real-ly mind not know-ing where it all goes

66

66 where this road will take

## Wishful Thinking

7

69

—you with no-thing to show — but a bus - ted — o-do-me-ter

73

and a tank full of wish - ful think-ing

78

you've cov - ered your bas - es you've found — all the loop - holes you're

8

## Wishful Thinking

81

81 watch - ing for signs of what - ev - er comes next 'Cause we don't

85

85 — want to know — what we'll — find and we don't — real - ly mind —

90

90 — not know - ing

Score

## A Midmorning Fender Bender

Leanna Smithberger

Swung

Voice

Piano

Well it seems I'm al-ways run-ning late no mat ter how ear-ly I try to go, but,

3

Now it seems my luck is run-ning dry as - sum-ing I had good luck to start with

3

5

I'm dri - ving way too fast I feel out of con -

5

Pno.

Pno.

2

## A Midmorning Fender Bender

7

trol the clock is re - lent - less too such a wor - ry - ing soul —

Pno.

9

9

Pno.

11

Well I guess, I guess I should have known bet - ter than to go rush - ing in blind, but,

Pno.

## A Midmorning Fender Bender

3

13

I don't al - ways do \_\_\_ like I'm told Life's too short to fall in line \_\_\_

13

15

I'm dri - ving way too \_\_\_ fast I'm rid - ing on bor - rowed

15

17

time the clock is re - lent - less to a soul like mine \_\_\_

17

Pno.



4

## A Midmorning Fender Bender

19

Pno.

21

Pno.

23

Pno.

I should have seen it coming

The musical score is for a piano accompaniment. It consists of three systems of staves. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano line (grand staff). The key signature is D major (two sharps). The time signature is 4/4. The first system starts at measure 19. The piano line features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a bass line with chords and eighth notes. The second system starts at measure 21. The piano line continues with similar patterns. The third system starts at measure 23. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "I should have seen it coming". The piano line provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords in the right hand and a steady bass line.

## A Midmorning Fender Bender

5

25

on but I drove right in - to that col - li - sion

Pno.

27

I felt - the guilt be - fore \_\_\_\_\_ I knew what went

Pno.

29

wrong \_\_\_\_\_ I di - dnt see you come a - long \_\_\_\_\_

Pno.

25

27

29

6

## A Midmorning Fender Bender

31

Pno.

33

Pno.

35

Well I guess I got what I de-serve bus - ted but not bro-ken in - side —

35

Pno.

The musical score is for a piano piece titled "A Midmorning Fender Bender". It is in 3/4 time and the key signature has four sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#). The score is divided into three systems. The first system starts at measure 31 and ends at measure 32. The second system starts at measure 33 and ends at measure 34. The third system starts at measure 35 and ends at measure 36. Each system consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment is written for a grand piano (Pno.) with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The vocal line is written on a single staff. The lyrics are: "Well I guess I got what I de-serve bus - ted but not bro-ken in - side —". The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and a more complex treble line with chords and single notes. There are some triplets in the piano part at measures 31 and 33. The vocal line has a melodic line with some rests and a final note on a dashed line.

## A Midmorning Fender Bender

7

37

It's en-ough to make me come un-nerved Life's too short to spend pay-ing fines —

39

I'm dri-ving way too — fast I feel out of con - trol the clock is re - lent -

42

- less too such a wor - ry - ing soul — I'm dri - ving way too —

Pno.

The musical score is written for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The time signature is 3/4. The piano part features a steady eighth-note bass line and a treble line with chords. The vocal line has lyrics about driving too fast and feeling out of control. The score is divided into three systems, each starting with a measure number (37, 39, 42). The lyrics are: 'It's en-ough to make me come un-nerved Life's too short to spend pay-ing fines —', 'I'm dri-ving way too — fast I feel out of con - trol the clock is re - lent -', and '- less too such a wor - ry - ing soul — I'm dri - ving way too —'.

8

## A Midmorning Fender Bender

44

— fast I'm rid-ing on bor-rowed time the clock is re-lent-less to a soul like mine

Pno.

47

*molto rit.*

The musical score is for a piece titled "A Midmorning Fender Bender". It is in 4/4 time and the key signature has four sharps (F#, C#, G#, D#). The score is divided into two systems. The first system starts at measure 44 and ends at measure 46. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "— fast I'm rid-ing on bor-rowed time the clock is re-lent-less to a soul like mine". The piano accompaniment consists of chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second system starts at measure 47 and ends at measure 49. The vocal line is silent, indicated by a whole rest. The piano accompaniment continues with a triplet in measure 47 and a "molto rit." (molto ritardando) marking in measure 48, leading to a final chord in measure 49.

Score

## On the Occasion of Your First Accident

Heavy swing ♩ = 100

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It begins with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked 'Heavy swing' with a quarter note equal to 100 beats per minute. The score is divided into three systems, each with a measure number (1, 5, and 9) at the beginning of the vocal line.

**System 1 (Measures 1-4):** The vocal line consists of whole rests. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note bass line and a more complex treble line with chords and eighth-note patterns.

**System 2 (Measures 5-8):** The vocal line enters with the lyrics: "You al - ways thought that you were bet - ter than me I used to tell you not to fol - low". The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic patterns.

**System 3 (Measures 9-12):** The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "not cap - a - ble of do - ing wrong right on the tail of the throng". The piano accompaniment concludes the phrase with sustained chords.

2

## On the Occasion of Your First Accident

13

You were the mo - del I should strive to be  
You would-n't li - sten to a screw up though

17

1. but now that's changed \_\_\_\_\_ so I wrote you this song  
so now I'll make \_\_\_\_\_ you lis - ten to \_\_\_\_\_ this song

21

2. *rit.* Out of tempo, recitative-style  
Be - cause this is where I get to say \_\_\_\_\_

3

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 13-16) features a vocal melody in the treble clef and piano accompaniment in the grand staff. The second system (measures 17-20) continues the vocal melody and piano accompaniment, ending with a first ending bracket. The third system (measures 21-24) begins with a second ending bracket, followed by a recitative-style section marked 'rit.' and 'Out of tempo, recitative-style'. The piano accompaniment in this section is more sparse, with some chords and moving lines in the grand staff. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

## On the Occasion of Your First Accident

3

*a tempo*

24 — what I've been wai-ting to say for so long.. I told you

28 so! I told you it could hap - pen to you —

33 the per-fect girl — the per-fect dri - ver but now your car

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 24-27) features a vocal line with a triplet of eighth notes and lyrics '— what I've been wai-ting to say for so long.. I told you'. The piano accompaniment consists of sustained chords. The second system (measures 28-32) has a vocal line with lyrics 'so! I told you it could hap - pen to you —'. The piano accompaniment continues with chords and a moving bass line. The third system (measures 33-37) has a vocal line with lyrics 'the per-fect girl — the per-fect dri - ver but now your car'. The piano accompaniment includes a key signature change to one sharp (F#) in measure 36.



4

## On the Occasion of Your First Accident

38

— doe-sn't look like new — you did-n't lis-ten to me — but now you

42

42 know I told you so!

47

47 and I'm so glad — that you weren't hurt — that it was-n't worse

## On the Occasion of Your First Accident

5

51

— but I don't feel bad — that now you're fin-al-ly just

51

55

— like me I told you so! I

55

60

told you it could hap - pen to you —

60

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 51-54) features a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment with a rhythmic melody. The second system (measures 55-58) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The third system (measures 59-62) concludes the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part includes various chords and melodic lines in both hands.

6

## On the Occasion of Your First Accident

65

you did-n't lis-ten to me — but now you know I told you

70

I said it once — I said it twice —

74

but you just shrugged and brushed me off —

The musical score is written for voice and piano. The voice part is in a single melodic line with lyrics. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, treble and bass. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 65-69) features a vocal line with lyrics and piano accompaniment with sustained chords. The second system (measures 70-73) continues the vocal melody and piano accompaniment. The third system (measures 74-77) concludes the vocal phrase and piano accompaniment. The piano part uses various textures, including sustained chords and moving lines in both hands.

## On the Occasion of Your First Accident

7

78

Here's some hum-ble pie \_\_\_\_ served by the slice \_\_\_\_

78

82

You should have known \_\_\_\_ that your luck \_\_\_\_ would wear off \_\_\_\_

82

86

I told you so! I told you it could hap - pen to you

86

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of three systems of staves. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The first system (measures 78-81) features a vocal melody with lyrics 'Here's some hum-ble pie \_\_\_\_ served by the slice \_\_\_\_'. The piano accompaniment has a steady eighth-note bass line and chords in the right hand. The second system (measures 82-85) continues the vocal melody with lyrics 'You should have known \_\_\_\_ that your luck \_\_\_\_ would wear off \_\_\_\_'. The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic patterns. The third system (measures 86-89) shows the vocal melody with lyrics 'I told you so! I told you it could hap - pen to you'. The piano accompaniment features a more active right hand with chords and moving lines, while the bass line remains steady. The score is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature.

8

## On the Occasion of Your First Accident

91

the per - fect girl — the per - fect dri -

96

ver but now your car — does - n't look like new — you did - n't lis - ten to me —

100 *rubato*

but now you know I told you so!

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of three systems. The first system (measures 91-95) features a vocal line starting with a whole rest, followed by a melodic phrase. The piano accompaniment has a steady eighth-note bass line and chords in the right hand. The second system (measures 96-100) continues the vocal melody with lyrics. The piano accompaniment remains consistent. The third system (measures 100-104) is marked 'rubato' and features a more expressive vocal line. The piano accompaniment includes long, sustained chords in the right hand and a moving bass line, ending with a double bar line.

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